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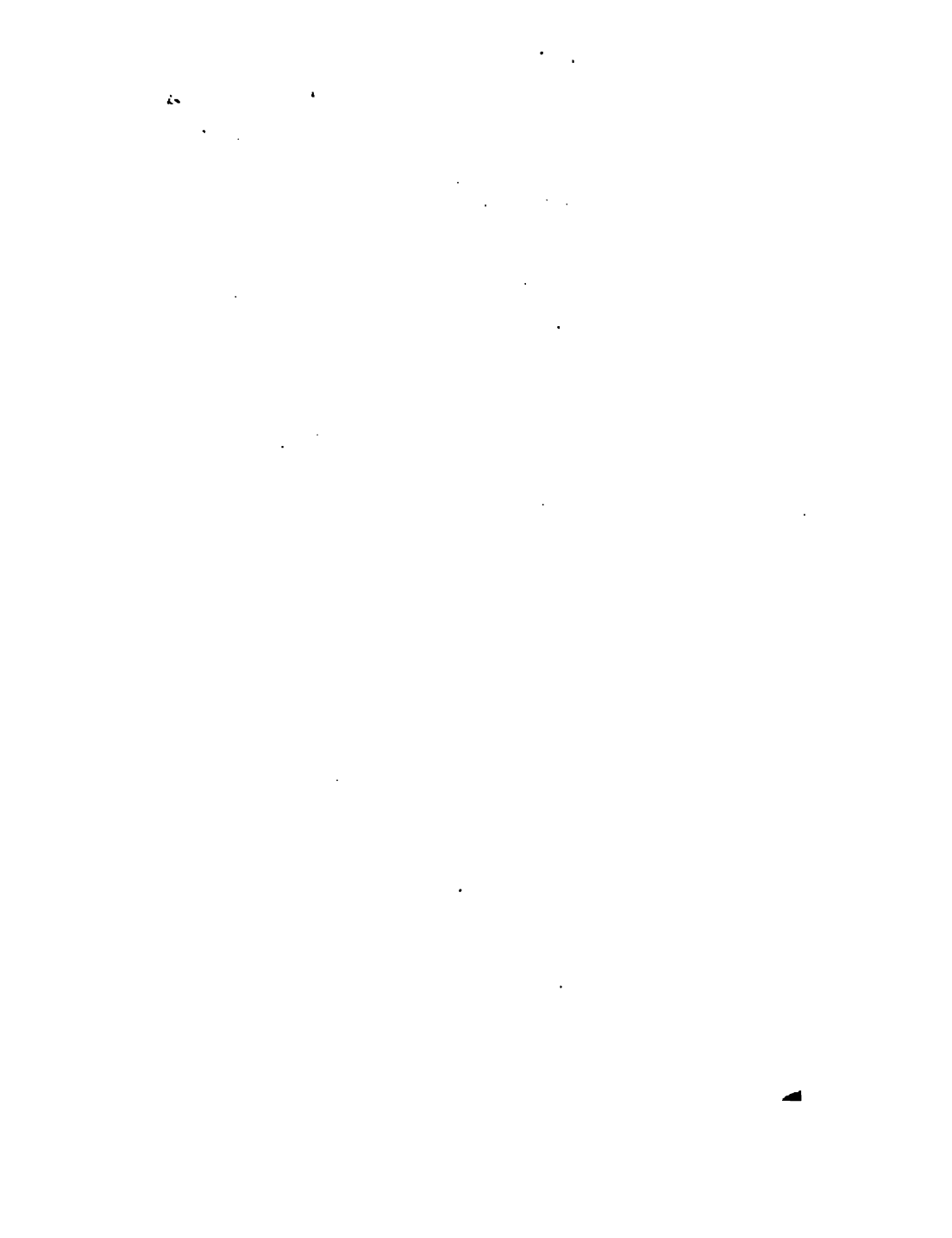
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ANGELS



AND
HEAVEN





ANGELS AND HEAVEN.

ANGELS

AND

HEAVEN:

BY
THOMAS MILLS,
AUTHOR OF "SURE OF HEAVEN," &c., &c.



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PREFACE.

WHO and what are angels? Where and what is heaven? And, if there be a resurrection of the dead, "how are the dead raised up? and with what body will they come?"

Are there really such beings as the angels of the Bible? Is there such a world as that called heaven? And will the perished bodies of the dead actually live again?

Angels have visibly and repeatedly walked on our earth, and have held interviews with men. Heaven has been occasionally opened to human eyes; and, through its open door, the melodies of angels and men have been heard, and the interior glories have been seen. Our own life and immortality have been so fully brought to light, that it is not less certain that we shall live for ever than it is that we are now alive.

With what ineffable sympathy, and yet with what profound grief, have we bewailed the departure of our dead! Wherever and whatever our departed friends may be, no communications pass between us and them. If we call they answer not. The incidents of an unseen life we cannot now know; only the appalling incidents of death being visible to us. But in the abode of despair there is hope, radiant as the angels in the sepulchre of Jesus. As we look down on the perishing body of the dead, great voices from heaven speak to our listening heart, "come up hither," thus bidding us to behold the glorified spirit; and often, as we have stood by the door of "the house appointed for all living," which, to every instinct of our nature, is dark and dreadful, we have, at *the bidding of Revelation*, lifted up our eyes to the

grandeurs of the "Father's house" on high; yet, we scarcely knew whither to look or what there was to see; so vague and unsatisfying were our ideas.

The elysium and empyrean of the Pagan, the sensual paradise of the Mohammedan, the heaven of earthly scenery, as a land of spirits, depicted in poetry and paintings, and the idealist's heaven of phantoms and impalpable abstractions, are all equally apocryphal. Even devout Christians have, in many instances, only vague ideas of their eternal future; for the divine representations of heavenly life and glory, being partly in metaphor, are imperfectly understood. The heart of humanity wonderingly and wistfully yearns, if not for new revelations, for more clearly defined ideas of the unseen world and of its inhabitants.

New revelations can be made only when "our change comes." Until then we must wait in faith and patience. But we may, in the meantime, seek to know all that the Divine Father has been pleased to reveal, as to the residence and condition in which our departed friends now are, and in which we also shortly shall be.

A great domestic grief was the sole occasion of my writing this book. The departure of one whom I loved as my own life caused me to feel, in view of the sad havoc of the grave, as though life had been nothing but a series of dissolving views, as though death were the absolute destruction of all life, and as though "eternal life" were a mere hallucination of hope. But as parental anguish was mitigated by faith in "Jesus and the Resurrection," I sought more fully to solace my spirit in the revelations of Angels and Heaven, which, for our consolation and hope, have been lovingly vouchsafed to us.

My theme is life, not death. I ask the reader to go with me, not to the cemetery, to explore cells of darkness, *but to heaven, to survey palaces of light.* I have not

written "Meditations among the Tombs." "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" They are not there; they are on high. The veil of concealment having been drawn slightly aside, by the hand of merciful love, we have glimpses of the splendours and of some of the inhabitants "within the veil."

The precious memories of the past, which cannot be obliterated from our hearts, and a hope more precious than any earthly memories can be, speak to us of reunions in the eternal life. There are deep problems in that hope, which may be studied though they cannot be resolved. In prosecuting our inquiries we would not stray into regions of unearthly romance, or surround ourselves with a fog of mysticism; nor would we beguile ourselves with day-dreams, or pursue any mirage, in this desert, however enchanting it may appear. We want not any mockeries in a paradise of illusions. Our search is after realities, certainties, truth. From grief and fear we flee to the gate of heaven; and, standing on its threshold, we listen, in the deep stillness, to angels' voices, and to the melodies of the "new song," and we gaze on the radiant forms which come forth from the ineffable Presence. Thus we seek to satisfy the yearnings of hope and love for a closer acquaintance with those pure, happy, and glorious immortals, who will very soon cease to be strangers to the most long-lived among us.

All my inquiries have been directed to that one only book which is able to answer them. Though it cannot be doubted, without impugning the veracity of credible witnesses, that even in modern times the living have seen and heard apparitions of spirits of the dead, yet superstition and mendacity have so largely traded on vulgar curiosity, and on the holiest cravings of humanity after eternal life, that the false reflect discredit upon the true. But the *narratives* and revelations of the Bible bear,

unquestionably, the endorsement of God; and, notwithstanding their brevity, they are replete with most precious instruction on heaven, and the eternal future of the redeemed. No other writings are so eminently suggestive; the sacred pages being thickly crowded with germs of sublimest thought, and with revelations of some of the greatest facts relating to the intelligent universe.

Revelation requires, like Nature, to be studied with the unbiassed spirit of early childhood; for whether the truth be ascertained or be misunderstood it cannot be altered. If we interpret the Bible by our creeds, instead of seeking to learn the truth, whatever it may be, some of us must become the dupes of our own prejudices. The popular sense of Holy Scripture is for the most part the true sense. "He may run that readeth it."—Hab. ii., 2. Our true province is intelligently and reverentially to endeavour to ascertain all that is expressly taught, and all that is logically implied; that thus we may be able to form some accurate and perhaps definite conceptions of the sublime objects of our hope in Christ. I may be permitted to add that, if one may presume to judge of others by himself, the inquiry is calculated greatly to strengthen our faith as Christians; and greatly to comfort us as bereaved and dying men.

EASTWOOD PLACE, HANLEY.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAP. I,

THE PROBLEM OF OUR BEING.

THE deepest problem of our being relates to the unseen and infinite future. In the presence of death, the most humbling and terrible of all earthly realities, everything relating to that future seems to be unreal and untrue. Life itself, hard as are many of its conditions, is like an illusion of the memory. Visible and palpable forms, full of pulsating energy and elastic spirit, become absolutely dead and inert, and, in time, so completely resolved into gas, vapour, and dust, that no man can find them. Some of the objects of our strongest affections helplessly and hopelessly succumb to disease, and become mere wrecks of their former selves; and a mere wreck, a worn, wasted, and perished thing must the body of every man become. What then is to be our eternal future, and the future of our beloved and vanished ones? Will it be a state of absolute and perpetual unconsciousness? or what will it be? Not in nature, not in reason can any sure hope for the endless hereafter be found; and, in ignorance and despair, men turn for refuge and hope to faith; for all our knowledge of immortality, and all our hope and certainty are in the revelations of God.

Above a thousand millions of human beings now inhabit the earth. Every day a hundred thousand die, yet every day our ranks are recruited in still greater

numbers, so that the huge aggregate of mankind daily increases. Where the present generation flourishes many other generations of former centuries have lived and died; and amidst the same natural scenery, probably, many others also will live and die. Wide regions of the earth, once the seats of empires, which formerly resounded with the hum of human life, and in which the passions and powers of humanity were developed, are now thinly inhabited. Ancient castles, abbeys, fortresses, and cities are now silent, solitary, and in constant decay, which formerly were the homes of innumerable hosts, whose forms, like our own, were full of breathing, pulsating vitality, but of whom not a relic can now be found. What long successions of fleeting forms have appeared in the streets of such cities as London, Rome, Jerusalem, and Damascus, and, after moving to and fro for a few years, have completely disappeared! Life is indeed evanescent, and ruin is irreparable. Our race is in its infancy, and the future will be incomparably greater than the past. A long succession of ages may pass before the present era of the earth's history shall be closed, and "time shall be no longer." The reproduction, multiplication, and succession of men never cease. Every day finds the earth's population greater than the day before. Well-peopled countries, under favourable conditions, constantly become more densely peopled. Every colony gives promise that it will grow into an empire. Farmsteads, factories, and great populations will hereafter flourish in regions in the solitudes of which only the adventurous traveller now pitches his tent. Wild hunting grounds and boundless prairies will in time be full of the activities of human life, and millions yet unborn will there have their cherished homes. These will be the scenes of their industry, and the places of their burial. To what a vast extent, then, will the population of this earth thus con-

time to grow! The one thousand millions of the existing generation constitute an aggregate of which we can form no adequate conception; while the stupendous aggregate of the future is utterly beyond the grasp of all human thought, for it seems to approximate to the infinite. And yet while the race flourishes the units perish, for all material forms of life must, like forms of vapour, vanish away.

What a succession of apparitions, then, are the successive generations of mankind! and what an apparition is every man, from his origin to his end! The most imposing of human forms consists of particles which are in constant change, like the waters of a current. Every moment they are being removed and replaced; and, so soon as the vital force in them is extinct, they are rapidly resolved into their primitive conditions, and are then undiscoverable.

Why, then, since life is ephemeral, do we live? and what, in the end, will become of us all? Our bodies will disappear, our names will be forgotten, our homes will not know us, and, were we able to return to the haunts we now most frequent, we should be regarded as strangers and intruders by them who will, by and bye, first inherit our places and afterwards inherit our doom. To our senses the dead are non-existent as the unborn, and death is a hopeless and endless night of unconsciousness and darkness.

But do we absolutely perish when we die? Is bodily dissolution equivalent to total annihilation? There have been mighty spirits on the earth, with invincible powers of will, with inexhaustible fertility of thought, with memories like living encyclopædias, with imaginations within which solar systems have revolved, and with such purely moral powers of conscience and of emotion as no animal can ever know. Are all these great entities

as completely extinct as though they had never been? Has the consciousness of each departed human being, with its marvellous mental and moral attributes, come forth only to shine and to vanish like a meteor?

If this be not so, whither have the departed gone? What is the mode of their existence? what is the sphere of their action? and what the locality, if any, in which they may be said to be present? So long as they were in "the body" they operated and acted in and through the body; yet they were neither parts nor properties of the body, but were altogether unlike and altogether superior to animal forms, and to the mere instincts of such forms. If they now have life they must be somewhere; for that which is nowhere is nothing. Could we form any clear ideas of the state and condition of the departed we should be able to imagine something of that dread future which awaits ourselves. In our deep darkness we earnestly crave for fuller and clearer perceptions of the invisible. Our whole heart yearns after palpable visions of the unseen, and would fain learn something more distinct than anything we now know of that state into which we shall shortly pass, and of the residence, companions, employments, and emotions of those who have gone before.

Thoughtful men in all ages have sought to solve these deepest problems of the human heart; but not from any natural source has any answer been evoked. Nature has given innumerable revelations to her readers, but all of them relate to herself. Every substance has revealed more or less of its constituent elements, its chemical properties and affinities, and its uses and its end. Treasures hidden in the depths of the earth have been laid bare before us. Creatures so minute, and worlds so distant, as to be invisible to the unaided eye, have been revealed to us through our mechanisms of glass; but as to the *dead all nature is* profoundly silent. The greatest powers

of vision which nature affords cannot penetrate that realm of darkness—the unscen. The revelations of science are far more marvellous than any dreams of fiction; but to the grave queries which relate to the future destiny of men, science gives no answer; for it cannot take cognisance of a world of spirits. Sense and reason being equally ignorant of the unscen world, are equally dumb respecting it. As the eye cannot know sounds, nor the ear know colours, so neither can the eyes, the ears, or any other bodily sense know the purely spiritual. Objects of faith can be known only by supernatural revelation; for they are as much beyond the province of reason as are the axioms and theorems of mathematics beyond the province of sense. Philosophy cannot understand any supernatural object or event; and what cannot be understood cannot be explained; we ask not, therefore, for testimony from so incompetent a witness. The living and the dead are equally silent on the subject of our second and eternal life. Humanity is its own greatest enigma. Life itself is so inexplicable a mystery that no man can know what it is; yet in the absence of divine revelations, there are in death even deeper mysteries than in life.

CHAP. II.

SUPERNATURAL REVELATIONS.

NATURAL things must have originated in the supernatural, it being obvious that nature could not originate itself; and the natural world is a curtain behind and above which exists the spiritual. It is not possible for us to become acquainted with the character or with the inhabitants of the unseen and supernatural world except by revelation; indeed, without revelation we could not know that such a world exists.

Such a revelation of the supernatural as all men need and desire claims to have come; and its genuineness and authority can be demonstrated only by supernatural evidence. The credentials of Revelation, apart from such as exist in its superhuman character and moral power, are chiefly two, viz., miracles and prophecy; miracles for the generations which received it, and prophecy for those which succeeded them.

The generations which witnessed the miracles could not judge of the evidence of the prophecies, for they could not live to see their fulfilment; nor could the generations which have seen prophecy deciphered and verified by history, or which now see it fulfilled in the current events of time, judge of the reality of the miracles, for they did not witness them. The most conclusive, and, indeed, the only possible evidence to the men who received the revelations from the supernatural world, was in supernatural works. Those men might have doubted the truth of that which they heard, but they could not doubt the reality of signs which they saw. Natural law is so immutable *and so irresistible that only the Creator who instituted it*

can set it aside. To deny that miracles are real because they are contrary to natural law, is to reject them for no other reason than that they are what they claim to be. To believe in miracles is simply to believe in God; for a miracle indicated His immediate presence, His special attention, and the absolute omnipotence of His will; it was His emphatic and visible response to an appeal made for His direct and express sanction to the revelations and moral laws which were delivered in His name. The God of truth could not bear false witness. He put forth His supernatural power, in miracles, in order that acts which were unquestionably His own, might be public demonstrations that His own words were also unquestionably His. Thus the power which created all natural elements, and instituted all natural laws, reappeared for the highest moral purposes, showing its absolute superiority to all natural law. Men might have doubted the divine authority of the supernatural words which they heard, but, unless they had the guilty infatuation of unbelief, they could not, as they did not, doubt the supernaturalness of the works which they saw. The works of Christ were wrought expressly to establish the divine authority of His words, and did so establish it; for they were wrought by His own power, in His own name, and by His touch or by His word, without any ceremony or invocation; and they were as public as possible, each miracle being witnessed by all such promiscuous throngs as happened to be present on the occasion. "The works that I do bear witness of Me," He said, "that the Father hath sent Me."—John v. 36. None but eye-witnesses could be competent to deny the genuineness of those miracles; but in no instance did any such witnesses deny it, though some said that the power displayed was diabolical, not divine. Miracles were acts of homage which obedient Nature paid to the power and Divinity of the Word of God.

The writers of the histories of miracles could not be deceived, for they were eye-witnesses; nor was it possible that they could have any motive or object in attempting to deceive others; so that deception by them was morally impossible. Of this there is abundant evidence in the great sufferings and martyrdoms which they endured, in confirmation of their testimonies as eye-witnesses of matters of fact.

The evidence of prophecy is not less supernatural than that of miracles. Some prophecies are as explicit as histories; while others, containing the germs of great histories, are written in the language of enigma. Had all the prophecies been equally plain they might have been open to the imputation of interference with the freedom of human action, and of having contributed to their own fulfilment. But such of them as are expressed in metaphor can be fully deciphered only by the events which fulfilled them; just as elaborate locks are opened only by their true keys. Each of the prophecies was written or enunciated at a time when nothing foreshadowed the predicted event; many were so contradicted by appearances that their fulfilment seemed at the time to be most improbable; and all were such as could be revealed only by the Omniscient One. History is the exposition of sacred prophecy; and the correspondences between them are so exact as to show that they are perfect counterparts.

But the demonstrations of prophecy are not instantaneous, like those of miracles. Prophecy often waits for years or for ages before its fulfilment can come; and even when the fulfilment appears it is not always fully recognised at the time. The evidence of prophecy is continuous and cumulative; and it becomes historically monumental of the truth of Revelation. As former centuries pursued their slow, unceasing, and stately march, a long series of *prophecies were verified by a succession of great histori-*

cal facts. The demonstrations are written in the annals of cities and of empires; and the very ruins of cities and of empires are monuments of the truth of Revelation.

Since John wrote the Apocalypse—so rich in revelations of Angels and of Heaven—each generation has contributed new evidence in confirmation of its truth. The prophetic symbols of that most precious book are clearly deciphered by the histories—during the last seventeen centuries—of the nations comprised within the ancient empire of pagan and papal Rome. Gibbon, an unbeliever, in writing his history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has unconsciously become the expositor of John. The century in which we live has richly contributed to the archives of prophecy; for the revolutionary era in Europe, the most eventful in the history of man, has revealed “the seven last plagues,” of the “seven vials,” in rapid succession, to an alarmed, afflicted, and astonished world.

The history of the people of Israel, in witnessing to the truth of the Bible, also bears witness to our immortality. While as a nation of pilgrims the Israelites were encamped in a wilderness, the Divine Spirit of prophecy constrained an alien seer to say, “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”—Deut. xxxiii, 9. And from that time to this they have dwelt alone. Their monotheism, their code of moral and ritual law, and their religious customs, formed, until their dispersion, a wall of separation between them and all other nations; and, since then, their invincible fidelity to their own ancient institutions and law, their equally invincible unbelief in their own promised Christ and King, and all their national idiosyncracies, have combined to keep them distinct from all the nations among which Providence has driven them. Great moral glories and terrible vicissitudes belong to *their history*, such as belong to no other.

Never were their wanderings so wide as they now are, yet never was the prophecy—uttered and written upwards of three thousand three hundred years ago—that they should “dwell alone,” more clearly verified than now.

When Israel and his family entered Egypt, at the invitation of Joseph, they dwelt alone ; and alone, like an impregnable caste, their descendants continued to dwell, while their increase was so great as to fill the Egyptians with fear, lest they should supplant them in their own land. Upon their emancipation by a series of prodigies, such as never occurred before or since, they departed in a body, by Divine direction, to take possession of a country which, through Abraham, the greatest of their ancestors, had been promised to them nearly five hundred years before. A way, on dry ground, was opened before them through a river and through a sea. During a forty years’ pilgrimage in the intervening desert, their daily food was nightly rained from heaven, a stream of pure water was brought forth from a dry rock, and a high column of supernatural glory moved before them as their guide. While they sojourned in that wilderness they repeatedly heard, from the heights of an adjacent mountain, the articulate words of the Eternal, and beheld awe-inspiring manifestations of His presence ; and from His hand they received a brief, compendious, and immutable code of moral law.

At the call of God, a succession of inspired prophets arose among the Israelites, who became His organs of communication to their contemporaries ; and who, as his amanuenses, wrote His revelations for the use of all future generations. From their hands came forth, during a thousand years, book after book to form the great volume which is our guide to eternal life. Those precious documents, notwithstanding their many and vehement *denunciations* of the national sins of Israel, were so

greatly valued by that people that, to secure the integrity of the text, they numbered the words and letters of each book, and ascertained the frequency with which important words occurred in each. They guarded the purity of the Holy Scriptures with a jealousy as strong and invincible as an instinct. Those Scriptures were almost their only literature, and were the class-books of their children, and the daily study of their most learned men.

When the Shekinah, or visible symbol of the presence of God, was no longer required as a guiding pillar of glory, it abode, first in the tabernacle and afterwards in the temple, over the mercy-seat, in the holy of holies, until, as a punishment of national idolatry, an invader, who was the scourge of God, destroyed the temple, and laid their metropolis in ruins.

In the tabernacle and in the temple the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, on behalf of men, was every day prophetically represented in symbols of blood and of water. Sacrifices depicted the great atonement by which heaven is opened to the guilty, consistently with the moral law that condemned them ; and the rites of purification, like Christian baptism, set forth that spiritual cleansing from sin by which the sinful become so spotlessly pure as to be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Some of the inhabitants of the highest heaven occasionally appeared, in benignant and condescending love, to the Israelites ; and, becoming distinctly visible and audible, they favoured chosen men with interviews and revelations, authentic records of which have been transmitted down to our times.

Though the witnesses of these manifestations died, they have never ceased to appear, in the persons of their descendants, before succeeding generations. The national identity of the Jews is unchanged. Their

testimony, which was always the same, evoked, in all ages, the scornful and passionate hatred of all nations, and subjected them, at the hands of zealots misnamed Christians, to innumerable miseries and martyrdoms; yet, even in their persistent unbelief in Christ, they were, as they still are, invincibly faithful to their national mission. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God."—Isaiah xliii., 12. That they might be His living witnesses before all nations, they have, in His inscrutable Providence, been scattered among all, as he said, eight hundred and fifty-seven years before the event, "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth."—Amos ix., 9. That prophecy is fulfilled to the letter. But, though dispersed, as a people they are indestructible. Like globules of oil among surging waters, they are as distinct from all other peoples as though they had no affinity with any. Had they been merged and lost in other nations it would have been said by sceptics that their history was partly or wholly fictitious. But though the ancient empires that oppressed them have perished, and notwithstanding that all nations, as though acting in concert, have pilloried them with scorn and gibbeted them with cruel hatred, they still survive and flourish; and they continue, amidst all their varieties, to retain the ancient and distinctive characteristics of their race and religion. They are still, as they have been in all ages since their dispersion, as unique a people as when they dwelt in Judæa; nor have they at any time ceased to maintain, as far as practicable, the identical institutions and laws which were founded, by Divine authority, upwards of three thousand years ago. Even now, amidst all their facial varieties, the Jews present the indescribable and identical physiognomy which appears on the carved *alabs of antiquity*; as though the very faces before which

angels and God appeared, were still before the world. In the light-haired Jews of Russia and Germany, and in their swarthy brethren of Africa, the same Jewish type is visible. Even intermarriages, which among other peoples frequently act injuriously upon offspring, seem not to have any such effect upon the Jews. In all generations and in every country they have been socially isolated; and, amidst all the mutations of empires and of time, they have been nationally immutable. Thus this most ancient and singular people has stood, and still stands, before all nations as a monumental witness to the truth of Divine Revelation; and the Sovereign Ruler of all things, while acting consistently with the moral freedom of men, has maintained, in the scattered Jews, an undying and indestructible testimony to the truth which they hold, and also, even in their unbelief, a testimony to that which they deny; and in them the men of all ages have beheld a nation of living witnesses to Revelation, an imperishable wonder of the world, and the standing miracle of time.

Though the Bible, to whose truth the Jews are indubitable witnesses, is a book of marvellous histories, biographies, laws, proverbs, poetry, prophecies, and letters, it has one specific object, to which all others are subsidiary, namely—to reveal eternal life as the gift of God in Christ. It propounds the only and true solution of the darkest enigmas of life and of death, and opens the infinite before us. In the light of the Bible hades becomes visible, hell itself is partially uncovered, the sublimest heaven is revealed, and the dead are seen to rise. Standing on the high rock of Revelation, we mortals inhale the air of eternity, and in the distant horizon we behold the dawn of the enravishing glories of the unseen world. Our outer man waxes old, and decays, and dies; yet we perish not like the brute, nor like the angels that fell.

Immortality is shown to be our chartered inheritance in Christ.

No mortal eye can trace the course of a human spirit upon its departure from the body, nor can the presence of such a spirit be discovered by any bodily sense. Our two natures, though united, are dissimilar, and belong to dissimilar worlds, so that though the spirit acts upon the senses, the senses cannot discover any of its properties or powers. Indeed the spirit has no knowledge even of its own essence. We are not able to imagine how a disembodied spirit exists, or how it can exist apart from an animal organisation. Where it dwells, or how its presence has relation to places, or how such spirits communicate with each other we cannot understand. All our perplexities in reference to the unseen world, and not a small amount of unbelief, arise from the vain attempt to understand and to define what cannot be understood. But surely we ought not to doubt a fact which God has revealed merely because we cannot understand it. To make our power of comprehension the measure of our faith must be of all things the most irrational. Ignorance is a pitiful apology for unbelief. It would require us to disbelieve in our own present existence; for we know not how our spirit is now incarnate, how it communicates, through the senses, with the outer world, how it thinks in the brain, how it experiences moral emotions, or how it controls the body. The hardest of all philosophies, to the human understanding, is that which relates to itself. Even the most common phenomena of the world contain inexplicable mysteries; and many questions on the most familiar objects may be asked which no man can answer. Beyond the facts and laws of things we know absolutely nothing. Being thus so ignorant of earth it is no wonder that we should be still more ignorant of *heaven*; and as life itself is a mystery so profound that

no man can define or understand it, how can we hope to understand the spirit's separate life or the eternal life? The future, like the present, can be known only as a fact. The fact that we are alive is known on the testimony of consciousness; and the fact that we shall hereafter live is known on the testimony of God. On the certainty of eternal life that testimony is most explicit. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep; that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope."—1 Thess. iv., 13. But though silent on some things that testimony never deceives, it never gives an implied or even a tacit sanction to a deception. Thus the Lord said, in reference to the many mansions in the Father's house, "If it were not so I would have told you."—John xiv., 2. He loves us too well to permit us to be enchanted with cherished illusions. Having disabused us of false hopes, and being unwilling that we should be ignorant of the true, He saves us from deception and from despair.

The evidence of the genuineness of a divine testimony to eternal life, requires a rigid and jealous scrutiny. A revelation claiming to have come from heaven, and having reference to our endless condition, must be of infinite importance to us; and we cannot, with full confidence, receive any message with so lofty a claim, unless its genuineness be attested by evidence so positive as to amount to a moral demonstration.

While one function of reason is, in relation to Revelation, to judge of the truth of that Revelation, another is to ascertain the true meaning of the words in which it is conveyed. Anything opposed to our reason, being absurd, must be false; but to be opposed to reason is one thing, and to be above reason is another. Objects of faith are above reason. The power of reason transcends that of instinct, just as the power of instinct transcends

that of sense. The domain of each power is peculiar to itself, and its limits are impassable. The credibility of truths and facts which can be known only by Revelation cannot be judged of by human faculties; so that on such subjects our only proper queries are those propounded to an inquirer by Christ, "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" Only as little children can the most intelligent and intellectual of men receive the Revelations which God has been pleased to give; indeed it is only in the docile, reverent, and confiding spirit of childhood that it is possible for any man to enter into the kingdom of God; yet child-like reverence, simplicity and faith, are perfectly compatible with manly judgment and ripe intelligence. When God deigns to speak we can only listen, like the angels that "stand hearkening to the voice of His word," and like the child Samuel, who said, when he heard the voice of the Lord, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

It becomes us to receive the words of God into our heart as our richest treasure. But the heart of the world is heedless and unbelieving. "If I tell you earthly things and ye believe not," said the Lord Jesus, referring to the work of the Holy Spirit on earth, "how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" The unbelieving would not believe them, even if told by one that rose from the dead. Though the Lord has not told us heavenly things, specifically and in detail, yet He "hath brought life and immortality to light;" so that we see "patterns of things in the heavens," and "figures of the true;" yea, we "see Him who is invisible;" and we know the way to Him and to heaven.

Our instructors are prophets and Christ, angels and God. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." God Himself has made immediate and *direct communications* to favoured men. His own voice

has been repeatedly heard by men, and the inexplicable phenomena of His presence have been seen. From His presence, in His high and holy place, angels of great power and glory have come forth, as visible demonstrations of the world whence they came; so that human eyes distinctly gazed on their faces, and traced the outlines of their forms. In interviews and conversations with angels, men received announcements which came to pass, felt the touch of angels' hands, and witnessed exhibitions of their supernatural power.

The Bible abounds with supernatural incidents, and with descriptions of things unseen. Though those descriptions are chiefly in metaphors, the narratives of superhuman appearances are eminently free from hyperbole, and in every instance they are written with circumstantial succinctness, and in a style of severe simplicity. No poetic drapery is fixed around the most memorable of all historical scenes; no romance of the imagination is depicted as fact; but all the details are described in the simplest and plainest language, and with a brevity that fills the spirit of curiosity with regret. We know less of heaven than of its inhabitants; and even of them we know so little, and that little is so marvellous, that we desire to "know even as we are known." Very soon we shall be as though we could see all of them face to face; but now we look towards heaven as through frosted glass, behind whose faint transparency celestial beings, like shadowy forms, move to and fro; but some scenes and objects are distinct; and very delightful it is to us, as denizens of earth, to contemplate distinguished visitors from heaven.

Great revelations have been made, in our times, of worlds formerly unseen, of whose existence former generations were altogether ignorant. The microscope and the telescope are *our great modern revealers*. In them "we

see" not "through a glass darkly" but brightly. Worlds of sentient and active life, hidden by their very littleness from human sight, and also worlds of stupendous magnitude, hidden by inconceivable and almost infinite distances, have been discovered. To most men, however, those worlds continue to be objects of faith. The many who have not seen can only believe on the testimony of the few who have seen ; but to some, who never looked through magnifying media, many facts of natural science appear as incredible as do miracles and superhuman apparitions to unbelievers.

We do not seek to discover the unrevealed ; our object is to learn only that which is taught. Being favoured with narratives of the visits of celestial messengers, and with didactic and highly figurative descriptions of the celestial world, we desire, while yet we are on the earth and in the body, to know all that can be known of the society and of the world into which at any moment we may pass. The fictions with which men regale their imaginations are worse than useless ; they are deceiving. Let novelists romance on the things of this world, if they will ; but to depict realms and scenes of fancy, and to call these the heaven of God and of the glorified, is to trifle with our most sacred and cherished hopes, and to endanger a reaction of unbelief. In relation to the most momentous of all facts, it behoves us to deprecate all fiction, and to search, not for the curious, the romantic, or the idealistic, but only for the true. Bible truths and Bible facts are not hard to learn. They are not buried in unfathomable depths ; but are placed on the very surface and in the sunshine, that we may know them. The spirit of superstitious credulity, however, has equal faith in the false and in the true ; while the spirit of unbelief would resolve historical facts into figures of speech, living beings *into myths*, and supernatural events into such as are *natural and common*.

By a devout and intelligent study of the Word of God we approach the very threshold of the supreme heaven, and are introduced into the august presence of superhuman beings. As we thus stand on holy ground the heavens open above us, and reveal their glories, and we behold visible manifestations of the eternal. The materialisms and vanities of this world would constantly crowd all heavenly thoughts out of our mind, until we have no hope and are without God; but the pensive and wearied heart, whose moral affinities are with the holy, the loving, and the heavenly, and whose highest love and joy are in God, would escape from all the elements of worldly strife, of moral grossness, and of unbelief, and resolve like Moses when, standing before the visible glory of the Lord, —a flame which consumed not,—he said “I will now turn aside and see this great sight.”—Ex. iii, 3.

PART FIRST.

ANGELIC APPARITIONS.

THE existence of beings superior to ourselves may be inferred from analogy. There is, on this planet, from the lowest and minutest organism up to man, a graduated scale of being, a colossal ladder rising step by step. The distances are fixed and immutable. The most perfect of one species is nearly on a level with the most imperfect of the species next above it; but the equality of any two is a natural impossibility. From the lowest grade of organic and sentient life up to man, there is no chasm, except that existing between the human mind and the highest degree of animal sagacity; and even sagacity sometimes approaches reason, and reason sometimes rises but little above instinct; yet the two are distinct. Man has a material and an immaterial nature, having an animal body with animal instincts, and an angel spirit; he is thus the connecting link between the material and the spiritual world. But does the ascending scale terminate in man? The disparity between man and God is infinitely greater than that between man and the humblest form of organic life. Judging, therefore, of the unknown from the known, we may infer that a still greater number of ascending steps exist above us than exist below us, and that other and higher ranks of intelligent beings rise by degrees from man to the highest of all the servants and worshippers of the Infinite One; so that the ladder which in this world reaches down to the feeblest consciousnesses, and to the minutest form, of organic life, may, and *probably does, ascend, in unseen worlds, to spiritual*

beings, the highest of which may be as superior to man as man is superior to creatures whose existence is discoverable only through the medium of the microscope.

Revelation distinctly confirms this view. It declares the existence of innumerable angels. Michael is stated to be an archangel (Jude 9), and one of the "first princes"—Dan. x. 13. Thus we are told that, as matter of fact, there are ruling angels and princes in heaven, and "first princes," also, of whom Michael was only one; and the obvious inference is that others are naturally of inferior rank. So great is the angelic hierarchy that there are also "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers." Of those celestial dignitaries nothing is revealed beyond their majestic and mysterious designations of office and rank. Those designations are generic. We cannot know the persons or functions, in the Divine monarchy, of these the highest creatures of God, until, by the dissolution of the body, we pass into that highest of all worlds to which they belong.

That spiritual beings exist might also be inferred from the fact that the Creator is Himself a spirit. "The blessed God" delights in His own nature and mode of being; and, had it been possible to have reasoned before anything was created, it might consequently have been supposed, that in the event of His exercising His creative power, His creations would as nearly as possible resemble Himself, and would therefore be spirits as He is a spirit. That He should create material worlds like this, must, *a priori*, have been much less probable than that He should create worlds of spirits, after His own image and likeness. But, as matters of fact, material worlds do exist, being infinite in number, and, notwithstanding, also, that they were the most improbable forms of creation, being most unlike God. It might be inferred, therefore, apart from specific supernatural revelations, that worlds of spirits, as the

most probable forms of creation, because the most like God, exist also.

The Creator Himself is, in His own nature, invisible. "No man hath seen nor can see" Him.—1 Tim. vi, 16. There have been manifestations of God; but He Himself said, to one of the most favoured of men, "Thou canst not see My face, for there shall no man see Me and live."—Ex. xxxiii, 20. Evil angels also are unseen; but that is by the will of God, and in consequence of their being evil, and not because they are pure spirits like Him. They are enchained in darkness (2 Pet. ii, 4, Jude 6), and are thus kept out of sight. No fallen angel ever became visible to men, or ever will be. Evil spirits have access to the imaginations, passions, and wills of men, and while the Son of God dwelt on the earth were incarnate for brief periods; but the mortal ear never heard one speak, nor did the mortal eye ever behold one appear. On such beings the light will never shine. They are entombed in dismal gloom. God keeps them in concealment from every eye, and has revealed to us only so much respecting them and their guilt as is necessary to guard us against their malignity and power. But holy angels have occasionally descended from "the high and holy place," and have not only appeared but have brought and have orally delivered messages from God, have wrought great deliverances, and have inflicted terrible judgments.

CHAP. I.

THE CELESTIAL SENTINELS.

THE first celestial apparition, of which we have any record, immediately succeeded the expulsion of the first human pair from Eden. So soon as they turned to look back upon the happy abode they had left, a new and startling spectacle appeared. Shining forms of life stood as sentinels, at the entrance, to repel them, should they attempt to return, and to prevent all access to the tree of life; and their presence, and that of a "flaming sword which turned every way," were intended to show that the Divine decree was irrevocable. The dazzling forms and the still more dazzling flame were on the threshold over which they themselves had passed only just before. The interval was so brief that the departure of the fugitives and the appearance of the cherubim were as nearly simultaneous as they could be to be successive. Thus one class of creatures departed, and almost instantly another and higher class appeared, not in loving benignity, but as a judicial act, to show that the expelled ones were never to return.

When the elder of the two fallen ones first became conscious of life he was like one who awoke from a deep sleep, but without any memories of the past. As he opened his eyes upon a young and most beautiful world everything was new. Though that was the first day of his existence, he was in body and in mind a perfect man; and, probably, special endowments supplied the want of education and experience. All this may be also said of the first woman. As all creatures in Eden passed before Adam, like a line of soldiers before their sovereign, he gave to each an appropriate name. Names have since

become arbitrary nouns, but in his case each designation was a description; as are many of the names now given to newly discovered objects and elements. The creatures thus named appeared to him as they now appear to us. But the cherubim that subsequently appeared to Adam and Eve were unlike all earthly creatures. How they appeared and what they were may be inferred partly from the words employed to designate the order to which they belong, namely, cherubim, seraphim, teraphim, living ones, and living creatures; and partly from the emblematical representations of cherubim, carved and embroidered by Divine directions; but chiefly from the graphic descriptions of them given by Ezekiel, in the first chapter of the book of his prophecy.

The names of these heavenly beings are names of life, of greatness, and of burning love. The figures which represented them were symbols of swiftness, of intelligence, of majesty, and of strength. In the holy of holies, of both the tabernacle and temple of Israel, were cherubic figures fixed over the mercy seat; their heads were bowed, as if in homage, before the visible glory of God; their eyes, as if in deep attention, were intently fixed on that symbol of the Divine presence, and on the blood of atonement sprinkled on the mercy seat; and their outstretched wings were symbols of ceaseless activity. The figures embroidered on the veil of separation between the holy and most holy place were similar in form.

The cherubim at the gate of Eden were associated with the phenomena of supernatural fire; and so also were those which Ezekiel saw, and which are described in detail by him. A fire infolded itself, and brightness was about it. From the fire and from a great cloud came forth four living creatures, each with four faces and four wings, and each presenting, emblematically, the likeness of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle. As though to

denote harmonious action in the service of God, their wings were joined together; and usefulness combined with velocity was denoted by hands beneath the wings. Whither the Spirit was to go they went. "Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps." Out of the fire went forth lightning, and the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. The firmament over their heads was as the colour of the terrible crystal. The noise of their wings was as the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, as the voice of a host. Above them was the likeness of a throne, on which there was the likeness as of the appearance of a man. And there was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. When the Prophet beheld this marvellous scene he fell on his face, and as he lay he heard the voice of God. On this and on every other occasion the cherubim are represented as being the immediate attendants upon God, and as connected with visible manifestations of His presence.

How unlike all the creatures of this world, notwithstanding the emblematic character of these representations, must the cherubim be! All earthly creatures are formed of and are sustained by earthly elements. What the cherubim were in essence and in nature is unknown. We must, however, dissociate from them all ideas of earthly forms of life, and must imagine them as beings who have no such earthly constituents, or properties of earth, as belong to the animal nature; and as not being subject to the laws and conditions of our organic life, such as generation and birth, nutrition and growth, health and disease, decay and death. Theirs are "spiritual bodies," ours are dust; and theirs would appear to be more spiritual than ours will be even at our resurrection from death. We know nothing in this world analogous to them; nor can we form any adequate conception of their

persons, their origin, their history, or the mode of their existence, nor can we tell how they operate and act, how they speak and hear, or how they see and are permitted to be seen by eyes of flesh. It is only by revelation that we know even of their existence. In their presence we are introduced to an entirely new, superior, and magnificent order of creatures. The cherubim were revealed, like the suns of creation, by their visible splendours; and they are as superior to us as the solar glory, that element of brilliancy and of burning, is superior to the dull, gross elements of earth. In the light of day they stood before the astonished and trembling ones of this world, as forms of dazzling splendour. Though brilliant as lightning the celestial vision was not evanescent. Day and night it was visible. It was not a dream, an optical illusion, or a mere display of composite symbols. The cherubim were living ones, in a truer, higher, and more absolute sense than that in which any organised forms of life like ours can be said to live.

In this scene on the eastern side of Eden the angelic and the human beings beheld each other. What a contrast was presented by these two! The first were holy and ineffably blessed, glorious in their own persons, and incapable of disease and death; they were the highest and most immediate ministers of the Eternal, having descended from the highest heaven, where they had lived, worshipped, and rejoiced in the holiness and love of God during an incalculable period of eternity. But the second were constructed of earthly elements, and yet they also had an intellectual and moral nature; they were young and had committed a fatal act, in direct opposition to the Divine command, and thus had become mortal and been punished by expulsion from paradise. The heavenly and the earthly stood face to face. With what different *emotions did the holy and the sinful gaze on each other!*

to what different conditions of life were they subject! and how different were their prospects! The guilty, in their abject misery, looked on the holy with wonder and fear; while the holy compassionately beheld the human and their world, now placed under a curse, a curse which, however, was mitigated by the promise of blessing. No appeals for mercy were made on one side, no voices of thunder rolled on the other. No words were spoken by the cherubim or by the fallen ones; and while nothing was said nothing was done. The awe-inspiring apparition was simply seen; yet it was one which could never be forgotten. The sinful well understood what was indicated by the presence of the holy; they turned away from the loveliest and happiest scene this earth ever knew; and their only hope was in the merciful promise that the Seed of the Woman should bruise the head or power of the tempter, who should "bruise his heel," or humbler nature, and that thus the lost paradise should be regained. The last traces of Eden were eventually obliterated from the face of the earth; and the very site, though its geographical locality is known, became undiscoverable. But the earth and its inhabitants are not given up to despair, for a new Eden, of greater beauty than that from which Adam was driven, will be formed, and that new paradise will be wide as the world.

When the first human pair saw the cherubim, guilt and misery caused them to think little of aught but what related to themselves, or the personal splendours of the angels might have led them to think of the far greater splendours of the angel world; for the existence of natural affinities between all the various inhabitants of the earth and the elements in which they live, might have led them to suppose that perfect correspondences also exist between Angels and Heaven. But until visitors from heaven appeared they were unacquainted with the

existence of any world other than their own. That the tiny specks of twinkling light on the night sky were great suns, around which were groups of revolving worlds, was an idea that must have been wholly foreign to their minds; so that, until angels appeared, they could not have expected to see visitors from any other world alight on the surface of this; and still less could they expect that any should descend from a world altogether invisible. They well knew that the cherubim were superhuman, that they belonged not to the earth, that they were ministers of judgment, and that they had a nature more kindred than their own to that of the Creator; and they must have felt, from all the instincts of guilt, that the cherubim were unapproachable by them, and that they could not hope to visit the world of angels as angels visited the earth. The great moral gulf between the good and the evil could be bridged only from the loftier side. The consciousness of shame constrains the guilty to shrink from the holy presence of the good; for the sight of sanctity is so humbling and reproachful, and is so great a reproof to sin, that there cannot be any community of feeling between the sinful and the holy. Had the cherubim advanced towards the fallen ones, they, probably, would have fled in fear; for not only were there no moral affinities between those that were of heaven and those that were of earth, but the sinful were intuitively conscious that the mission of the angels was punitive; and the very thought of being translated to the heavenly paradise, had it occurred to them, must, after they had been expelled from the paradise of earth, have been regarded with despair.

Guilty humanity, because it is guilty, instinctively shudders in the presence of superhuman apparitions; strong men have been unmanned by them, and men of *war, hardened against the fear of death, have become as*

dead men. But the cherubim at the gate of Eden were not the only objects of fear; there was also "a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." That was the chief object of dread. Angels are really terrible only when, like the cherubim, they are sent on missions of judgment; for they, like God, are holy and loving. The "flaming sword" turning every way was a terrifying sword. But Adam had not then seen such a thing, nor could he have any idea of its use as an instrument of war. It is not stated that the sword was in the hand of any one of the cherubim. Like them it was "placed," or, more correctly, it dwelt, at the east of the garden. The appearance was that of flame; and the word sword is popularly supposed to indicate its form, and the words "turned every way" to express revolving action. But it is not said, nor is it implied, that the "flaming sword" turned every way by the action of the cherubim. The motive power was clearly in the "flaming sword" itself, independently of them.

The true idea intended to be expressed by the words rendered "flaming sword" can be ascertained only by noting the sense of the same words in other instances in which they occur. In this inquiry poetry and pictures would only mislead us, for they represent popular errors. That there was supernatural fire is certain, for the word translated "flaming" has no other meaning than that here given to it; but what is to be understood by the sword? The fallen ones had no military ideas. Such ideas came not from heaven; nor did the sword, that terrible engine of violence, first appear from God. If the word here translated sword had clearly denoted the sword in every other instance, it must have been understood to denote the sword in this instance also; but if the word is used elsewhere in other senses than that of sword, it may here also be used in another sense. Though in some

instances it designates the sword, its primary sense as a verb, is to destroy as with fire, to consume, to lay waste; and it designates the sword only because the office of that instrument of war is to destroy. The same word is found in the sense of heat in Gen. xxxi., 40, in Job xxx., 30, in Is. xxv., 4 and 5, and in Jer. xxxvi., 30; and in those places it is translated in the sense in which it is used. Adam could not have understood the meaning of such a symbol as that of the sword, as unhappily we have long since understood it. A flaming element of heat is therefore the more probable idea intended to be expressed.

Our version conveys the idea of a sword of fire in revolution, as though brandished by an angel's hands. But the action was not from any hand; it was in the flaming fire itself. The true idea is not that of "turning every way;" it is that of evolution and involution, the act of turning or moving within or upon itself. A similar description is given by Ezekiel, at the beginning of his prophecy, of a similar supernatural fire "infolding itself," or "catching itself," as the margin reads. It went up and down among the living creatures,—the cherubim,—and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. At the giving of the law on Sinai, too, there were the phenomena of supernatural fire; and on that occasion also angel hosts were present.—Psalm lxviii., 17. A dazzling fire, with coruscations, as of lightning, was the visible symbol or manifestation of the presence of God; and at every such manifestation of God the cherubim appeared. "He sitteth between the cherubim," says David.—Ps. xcix., 1. As the emblematical figures of cherubim environed the cloud of glory in the holy of holies, so the cherubim were present when God appeared in fire; and by that fire coals were kindled, rocks were melted, and mountains were troubled. On *the mercy seat*, and as guide to the hosts of Israel in the

wilderness, He appeared in the symbol of mild and benignant glory; but His just anger against sin is represented as a devouring and consuming fire.—Ex. xxiv., 17, Deut. iv., 11, and Heb. xii., 29. God appeared on Mount Sinai, before all Israel, as a burning fire; and He thus appeared in this the first of such judicial manifestations. The idea of a sword must be altogether eliminated from this narrative, for while the Hebrew word does not necessarily contain that idea, the use of the word in other places, and corresponding manifestations of God in fire, show that the flaming fire that turned every way was not a military metaphor, a mere instrument to be wielded by the hand, but was the Shekinah, the fiery symbol of the presence of God. God had previously communed with the first of human beings in fatherly love. They were then distinctly conscious of being in “the presence of the Lord,” and they heard “the voice of the Lord.” But now that they were fallen and were driven forth, the almost familiar manifestation ceased, and the Divine oracle of truth and love was silent. God now appeared before them, attended by cherubic ministers, as an object of dread, and in solemn witness against the guilt of their sin. They were not the first of all sinners, nor was Eden the first scene of sin. Sin first appeared in heaven itself. It occasioned the creation of a new and penal world, a world altogether unlike any other, in which Satan and his angels, accomplices in one great act of treason against the sovereignty of God, perpetually dwell; and sin has filled this world,—all its natural beauties and the affluence of the Divine bounties notwithstanding,—with desolations and distractions, and made it a second hell, a world of hatreds, of miseries, and of graves. The august spectacle of the flaming fire, in rapid action at the gate of Eden, appears to be so identical with the Divine phenomena, in symbols of fire in-folding

itself, in the vision of Ezekiel, that it may be said of one as he said of the other, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Lord."—Ezek. i, 28.

The Divine apparition was not transient. It continued until the first two sons of Adam had become men; for the Divine oracle addressed Cain, the murderer of his own brother; and, when he began his vagrant career, it is said that "he went out from the presence of the Lord;" thus showing that, though God is omnipresent, there was at that time a locality where His presence was visible.

How long the cherubim continued near to Eden is not stated. Whether or not this was their first appearance is not certain; but it is quite certain that it was not the first visit of angels to the earth. When the earth was finished, in this the last though not the final period of its history, "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy." Thus, the silent regions over the earth then resounded with angels' voices, such voices as four thousand years afterwards were heard by shepherds, singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It is not difficult, nor is it unscriptural, to suppose that as God himself deigned to appear and to speak to the founders of our race in Eden; so also, like Him, the angels of God visited this one of the many mansions of our Father's house, and held visible interviews with them in their unfallen state.

But when angels are unseen they are not, strictly speaking, invisible. The unseen is simply not seen, the absolutely invisible cannot be seen. To say that the angels cannot be near to us without being seen, would be to speak with confidence on a subject on which, being ignorant, we are not competent to speak. When they have appeared their appearance has in most instances been sudden, as though they had come forth from the *condition of invisibility*.

The almost instantaneous appearance of the cherubim, after the commission of sin, shows how quickly that sin was known in heaven; and were sin to be committed in any other world it would be known there equally early. Sin is abhorrent to every holy being, for it is treason against God, it contains in itself all the elements of anarchy and misery, it is ruinous to society, and fatal to the sinner. Heaven has relations to all other worlds, such as not one of them has to any other; for, as the centre of Divine government, and as the abode of its great ministers and agents, it is the metropolitan world of the infinite monarchy; and, as though invisible lines of telegraphic communication were established between heaven and every other world, on which intelligent and moral beings dwell, all the great events of those worlds are instantly known in heaven.

The silent scene at the east of Eden would never be forgotten by those who saw it. The celestial images, and the burning symbol of the Divine presence, would be continually present in the imagination of Adam throughout his life-time of nine hundred and thirty years. When centuries had gone by, and while new generations were growing up around him, the memory of that scene would still be before him. After death Adam would meet the cherubim again, but not as he met them on earth, for at this second meeting they would not be objects of bodily vision, as they were before; nor indeed would he be known to the cherubim as when he was in the body. Their condition would be unaltered, but he would have become a disembodied man, having passed through that great change which is an unsoluble mystery to the living, and which can be adequately understood only by the dead. The scene just outside the gate of Eden will be remembered by Adam and by the cherubim even to this day, and they, like us, may be thinking of it now.

CHAP. II.

ANGELS WITH ABRAHAM AND AT SODOM.

AGENTS of destruction have been occasionally employed by the Supreme Judge, which, though called angels, were not intelligent persons; for the Greek word, *angelos*, and the corresponding word in Hebrew denote a messenger, either personal or impersonal. In Ps. lxxviii, 49, the plagues of Egypt, for instance, are called evil angels; and in 2 Kings xix., 35, 2 Chron. xxxii., 21, and Isaiah xxxvii., 36, the destruction of Sennacherib's large army, in one night, is said to have been caused by an angel which the Lord sent forth; yet in neither of these cases was the angel a celestial being; for anything which the Almighty may employ as His agent is His angel. He makes winds to be His angels, and flaming fires to be His ministers.—Ps. civ., 4. In the latter instance it is certain that the destroying angel was a "blast," for it is so described in the message, predicting the event, which Isaiah sent to King Hezekiah.—2 Kings xix., 7. The agent was natural, but it was called forth by supernatural, power and produced unusual effects. This blast appears, from Is. xxx., 30, to have been caused by an electric storm, in which there was "the glorious voice" of the Lord, "the lighting down of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and with the flame of devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones," so that the Assyrian was beaten down. The elements employed in this and in a corresponding event, the destructive thunderstorm in Egypt (Ex. ix., 22-25), were angels of the Lord. Though these were terrific demonstrations of the power and justice of *the Almighty*, His agents were not living beings from *heaven*, but merely earthly elements.

In several instances, however, the Almighty employed angels proper as the executors of His will; and the facts are very suggestive. The first in chronological order is that of the sudden and complete destruction of "the Cities of the Plain."

The lake known to history and to the world as "the Dead Sea" is unlike every other lake. Its waters are too bitter, too salt, and too loathsome to be drunk. No fish live in it; no sail is unfurled over it; and the region all round it is rocky and desolate. It is the phenomenon of the earth, and a hundred generations have beheld it with wonder. But so lately as the time of Abraham and Lot the site of that lake was a lovely, fruitful, and populous valley, "well watered everywhere as the garden of the Lord."—Gen. xiii., 10. The destruction of the cities, villages, and rural beauties of the scene, and their subsequent burial in the strange water of that sea, were pre-historic events; and from the narrative of their destruction, which Moses has given, we learn some interesting facts relating to the angels of heaven.

Many cities of the world have been devastated by earthquakes, several have been buried by volcanic eruptions, and both cities and empires have been ruined by their vices, and destroyed by military conquerors. But the destruction of the Cities of the Plain was by supernatural power, and the event was so unique that nothing like it ever occurred before or since, and may never occur again. The depravity of the inhabitants was indescribable. The cry of their guilt went up to heaven, reaching the very angel world, as no such cry ever did before. Angels came down to destroy them instantaneously and utterly, to obliterate the very scene from the face of the earth, and to hide it from earth and from heaven by a lake near to which no man desires to dwell.

In the afternoon of a sunny day Abraham sat in the open air at the door of his tent, at no great distance from the doomed valley. While thus seated he saw, at a short distance, three human forms approaching. They were unaccompanied by attendants. No beasts of burden were laden with baggage for their use; no knapsack was on the back of either of the travellers; no bag was in their hands, so that they had no changes of dress, no stores of provision; nor had either of them so much as a staff. No wanderers could be more destitute of all facilities of worldly comfort than, in appearance, were they; and yet in the visitors who thus approached him the princely patriarch beheld no plebian aspect. He saw that they were not ordinary pilgrims. There was no circumstance of pomp or state external to themselves, nor any indication of worldly wealth, yet a commanding presence appeared in each. When Abraham "saw them he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground," to welcome them; and, without inquiring into their names, their social relations, or their mission, or asking whence they came or whither they were going, he addressed them deferentially, and urged them to accept hospitality as an honour to himself. His offer was accepted, and, sitting in the shadow of a tree adjacent to his tent, they partook of a repast which Sarah, his wife, prepared.

Who were these mysterious strangers? They came as wayfaring men, to whom rest and food would be welcome; and yet they were not of this world. They partook, or appeared to partake, of bread and butter, of milk and roasted veal; and Abraham stood and ministered to them. He failed at first to discover the heavenly dignity of his guests. He "entertained angels unawares." Moses, writing long after the event, describes one of the three *as the Jehovah*, and the remaining two as angels of the

Lord; but to their honoured host they appeared as men. We must not assume, however, that that is the true, natural, and only form of angels. If at any time they reveal themselves to the intelligent inhabitants of other worlds, it may be in the semblance of those to whom they appear. It may be improper invariably to attribute the human form to them, as it would be so to attribute that form to Him who also on this occasion appeared as man; and yet it may be that the human form is that in which heavenly beings appear to each other in heaven; but we must not assume that merely because they thus appeared on earth. Could we have seen the mysterious three approach the tent of the shepherd prince, and their interview with him, and could we have witnessed their repast, and have listened to the conversation of the host and his guests, we might not at the moment have deemed the scene to be so memorable as it really was; and yet it was a prelude to the revelation to Abraham of the impending destruction of the Cities of the Plain, to his importunate pleading on their behalf, and to the actual infliction of the terrible judgment.

Abraham, the two angels, and the Lord proceeded together from the tent towards Sodom, walking side by side in the way. On no other occasion did so august a group walk on the earth; for one of the four is honoured with the name of the "Friend of God" (2 Chron. xx., 7), and was the father of the most peculiar of all nations; two were angel ministers from the holiest and grandest of all worlds; and, above all, the fourth was the Jehovah. How interesting it would even now be, were it possible, to trace the track over which they passed, and especially to stand on that most honoured spot on which, after the departure of the angels, the Lord and Abraham stood face to face, one offering and the other listening to intercessory prayer!

The angel men had not suddenly appeared to Abraham after the usual manner of angels, nor did they suddenly vanish; so that, unlike Eliphaz, Daniel, Mary, the Bethlehem shepherds, and the apostle John, when angels appeared to them, he was not terrified by their presence. They came in familiar forms, as though they had been purely human; and throughout the interview they appeared in all the conditions of humanity.

When the angels had departed to fulfil the errand on which they came, the Lord remained in solemn conference with Abraham, and to him He revealed the impending doom of the guilty cities. He stood before him in a form like his own, speaking his own language in a human voice, and patiently listening to his importunate appeal for mercy to the guilty because of the possible presence of the good. But though the Lord thus appeared as a man, He spake as the Supreme Judge, whom great depravities had offended, who had absolute command of all natural and supernatural powers, who spared or destroyed the lives of the guilty, and who heard and answered prayer. At the end of the interview, "the Lord went His way." On the following morning, very early, Abraham stood once more on the memorable spot on which he had pleaded with the Lord; but he then beheld, not an enchanting landscape, as before, but a region of smoke, like "the smoke of a furnace."

How had the angels entered Sodom, and how had they left? They entered as wayfaring men, unchallenged by watchmen at the gate. Had they come in chariots of fire, each bearing a sword of lightning in his hand, had strange omens in fiery forms appeared on the adjacent hills, or had any unearthly terrors indicated the arrival of ministers of vengeance from the unseen world, consternation might have prevailed in Sodom. But no *forms*, either of glory or of darkness, were seen careering

in the heavens; nor were awe-inspiring voices heard from the invisible world. Angels from the "high and holy place," the "glorious high throne," the palace world of the Eternal, came in; but they were not arrayed in robes of fire, nor did men see aught that was extraordinary in their appearance.

Very early on the morrow, even at the dawn, all the plain was to be instantly and totally destroyed, not by natural causes, but by burning and suffocating elements, supernaturally rained down from above by Him who, with attendant angels, had appeared to Abraham near his tent. Yet no signs of impending judgment appeared. While all was beautiful and calm on the earth and in the heavens, strangers entered Sodom, and went direct to the house of the only righteous man in the place. There was nothing very noticeable in that, yet that was all. Whence they came, who they were, what their errand was, or whither they would go upon their departure, no one knew, and, as they passed along, no one, probably, cared to inquire. During that one eventful night the incidents of their stay in Sodom were few. At first they refused to spend the night in Lot's house. Instead, however, of abiding all through the night hours in the street, as they had purposed and insisted upon, they at length yielded to Lot's importunity and went in. And while within, they, by supernatural power, inflicted a judgment on the wicked men of Sodom who assailed them, and made a revelation which filled their host with astonishment and terror. In our houses angels may be present unseen; but in Lot's house they were visible and palpable forms, and they had publicly passed through the streets of Sodom. Their presence there was publicly known, and, being noised abroad, a throng of deeply debased men gathered round the house. The object of that gathering would lead us to suppose that the angels were forms of

beauty, for they were objects of unnatural desire. Events have occasionally given rise to new names and phrases, and the presence of the angels in Sodom is immortalised by a word, the designation of a crime so abominable as to be incapable of being defined.

The power of these heavenly beings in human form was shown by a miracle. A great band of the fearfully wicked men, with loud clamour, demanded admittance into the house, that they might have access to the newly-arrived guests; and they attempted to force the door. Scenes of violence, and of crimes more shocking even than violence, were about to be enacted. In an instant, however, the assailants were disconcerted and rendered powerless by blindness; but even in their blindness they persisted in their purpose. That deprivation of sight answered two objects at once. It insured protection to the house and all its inmates, from their assailants, and while it disabled those assailants it punished them. This was the first instance in the annals of men of the supernatural action of angels. When their power was thus shown they were within the house, and the men were without; so that there was no personal contact, nor was any mechanical act of violence committed upon them, to blind them. It does not appear that pain accompanied the infliction, for no exclamations of suffering are recorded; and the men continued to grope for the door as though no calamity had befallen them. They were sensible of being in complete darkness; but as it was night, and no lamps were in the street, the sudden loss of all power of sight would be attributed by them to natural causes. This instantaneous blindness might be consequent upon paralysis of the optic nerve, in which case supernatural power must have acted internally in every one of them.

This great judgment was inflicted, not upon mere units *in the crowd* around the house, but upon every one in

that crowd, and upon every one in a moment, and at the same moment. There were thus as many miracles as there were men. Every man was unconsciously subject to a supernatural power, emanating from the two mysterious visitors within the house of Lot. The angels smote them, but not with the hand. How they were smitten does not appear. The sight thus destroyed was the gift of Him who instantaneously took it away. As creatures cannot create, neither can they do aught that is contrary to the laws by which creation is governed. The men became blind by the action of the Almighty's will; but it was at the instance of angels; just as Elymas was struck blind at the instance of Paul. The agency of the angels, like that of the Apostle, was ministerial, but it was a reality. The angels, like Paul, were entities. In their presence there was a power superior to that of natural law; which our sense judges to be irresistible. Our knowledge of supernatural power is purely in faith, but faith is founded on matters of fact. They who appeared as ordinary human beings were not human. The judgment they inflicted was by Divine power, there being neither disease nor mechanical force in the case. This miracle is inexplicable, as are all miracles. Their occurrence, and the presence of unearthly beings who perform them, whose forms are visible, and whose voices are audible, are revelations of the inhabitants and of "the powers of the world to come," such as astonish us, and as are altogether outside the lines of our philosophy.

One celestial being might have sufficed for their work of judgment, but there were two. One alone could not render due honour to the manifested presence of Him who appeared to Abraham; and more than two might have been too formidable to appear before the patriarch. The two would come forth from their native world together, and together they would return; for they did not

separate during their earthly mission. They must consequently have been perfectly well known to each other, and have known each other's name, and age, and rank, office, and history. They were fellow-servants of the Most High, and harmoniously co-operated in the fulfilment of His will. There does not appear to have been any superiority in one over the other. They acted as co-ordinates, as "true yoke-fellows."

In heaven angels "neither marry nor are given in marriage," and, consequently, they have no family relations or domestic affections. Their sentiments and spirit of love must be so purely cosmopolitan as to transcend all our conceptions. Love will be the all-pervading element and law of their moral nature. Each one will have as separate and distinct a personal identity as have the inhabitants of this planetary world; but selfishness will be unknown, and there will be amongst them the most perfect conformity of moral nature with the second of the two great commandments, which is like the first, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The angels do not appear to have slept. When they declared it to be their intention to "abide in the street all night" they showed that they had no need of and no desire for a dormitory, or for couches or coverings. The whole scene of the assault, and of the crowd being smitten with blindness, was in the early darkness, before the time when men lay down for sleep. The revelation made to Lot, and the direction to secure his family, were given in the night; and while he ran to the several houses of his sons-in-law, to conjure them to escape, the angels abode in his house, and awaited his return. It was in the night that they urged him and his family to flee, and that they escorted them from his house and through the streets of the city to an adjacent height, beyond the reach of danger. On the previous day they had descended from

heaven, had visited Abraham, and had walked from his tent to Sodom; and now, after passing the night in Sodom, they became the executors of the judgment of God on the cities; yet, as though unwearied, they did not require sleep. Action superinduced no fatigue. As some angels excel in strength (Ps. ciii., 20) the strength of others must be inferior; but, as they sleep not, the strength of every one must be other than muscular strength, like ours. They belong to a world in which there is no night (Rev. xxi., 25), and in which, consequently, the inhabitants do not need sleep. The forces with which they act are, like those of the natural world, never greater, never less, and never decay or die. Sleep is the effect of animal weakness, and is necessary to recruit exhausted nervous energy. Sleep and death are kindred conditions, but angels neither sleep nor die.

Had the heavenly visitors not appeared in the costume of humanity, their interviews with Abraham and Lot and their families might have excited great fear. Human instincts are terrified by any real or supposed contact with the unearthly and supernatural. Once a spirit passed before Eliphaz. It stood still, and the image was before his eyes; but he could not discern the form thereof. There was silence, and then a voice uttered articulate words, which, though few, were impressive. The apparition demanded—"Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly. How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth," &c. Eliphaz was so terrified at the presence of this image, in an indistinct form, and at the utterance of this speech, that he said, "the hair of my flesh stood up."—Job iv., 15. When an angel appeared to Daniel, the prophet swooned away. When the

disciples of Christ, being on a lake in an open boat, mistook the person of their Lord, walking on water, for a spectre, they uttered loud screams of terror. When the angel-herald of the Saviour's advent appeared to the Bethlehem shepherds they were greatly terrified. And when, after the lapse of many years, the Lord, in His glory, re-appeared to the apostle John, that holy man fainted and was ready to die. But Abraham and Lot were not terrified. Indeed they at first supposed their visitors to be men. The truth dawned very gently upon them. They saw angels as men walking. The superhuman was revealed to them so mildly as to re-assure their confidence. Lot, like his uncle, offered the angels a repast, and it was accepted. Not, however, until they had smitten the guilty throng with blindness, and had revealed the impending doom of the cities, were they themselves understood. Two inhabitants of the "Father's house" were then recognised as being visibly present in the house of Lot, as guests. They had been seen in the streets. The wife and daughters of Lot saw them. Voices wont to be heard in heaven, and accustomed to speak to other angels, and to sing with them the praises of heaven, were heard in his house. And when he was outside his own door he felt the grasp of the angels' hands, as of the hands of men, pulling him back within. But no sooner was the scroll of burning unrolled before him than he recognised the divine mission of his guests, and ran to and fro about the city, to warn his sons-in-law and their families of the instant doom of Sodom; and then, at the instance of the visitors, and accompanied by his daughters and his wife, he abandoned his home and all his property, and permitted himself to be hurriedly escorted to an adjacent height; but only just in time to escape from destruction.

The work of the avenging angels was quickly accomplished. No earthquake overturned the Cities of the

Plain, no adjacent volcano belched forth burning lava, no thunderstorm with floods and with fire destroyed them. A rain of sulphur and a rain of fire fell, simultaneously, all over the plain, upon every inch of ground. The wicked suffered no prolonged torture; their extermination was sudden and complete. "The garden of the Lord" became in one hour like a furnace; and as Abraham stood at a distance, very early on that eventful morning, he beheld dense smoke over the whole region; and now the ruins are covered by a natural phenomenon, for a great lake envelopes the whole; a lake, unlike every other, in the taste, chemistry, and density of its water, and in its surrounding desolations. It is thus an indestructible monument of supernatural agency.

This unexampled act of terrible destruction was not the effect of natural causes, like the destruction of Herculanium or of Pompeii. It was not from the natural law of consequences, like the ordinary penalties of transgression. Not any natural law was adequate to the effect. A power which we cannot comprehend was put forth. Individuals and nations are ruined silently, slowly, and inevitably by their vices; and frightful ruin is caused by subterranean and electric disturbances. But neither of those mighty agencies was in action here. The earth was unmoved, and the electric forces were undisturbed; yet the most destructive of all elements fell in broad and burning masses on the plain. Such a destruction is as inexplicable as creation itself. The destroying elements, as such, did not previously exist, but were presumably made for the occasion. Thus the act is represented as being that of Jehovah Himself. "Jehovah rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire, from Jehovah out of heaven."—Gen. xix., 24. Why then were the two angels present? Their presence showed that the destruction was not to be included in any class of natural occurrences.

that it was a Divine judgment, and that, as such, it was inflicted by supernatural and Divine power. They acted as the deliverers of the four rescued ones, and they were also the ministers of judgment. Thus they said to Lot, "We will destroy this place. Jehovah hath sent us to destroy it."—Gen. xix., 13. And one of the two angels, speaking on behalf of both, and respecting Zoar, said, "I will not overthrow this city for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither."—Ibid 21,22. Thus this supernatural event is imputed to the Almighty, and also to two of His angels. The power belonged only to Him; the agency was in them. We cannot understand the character and extent of that agency, for we know nothing even of natural laws but by their phenomena, while of the supernatural we know nothing but recorded facts. But it is inconceivable that men should have been able to do what the two angels did.

The angels left the earth when they left Lot at Zoar; and they who had walked as men in Sodom, and spent a night in Lot's house, were now in action in the region above. How marvellous must be that power with which they rained suffocating and burning elements, "from Jehovah in heaven," on a region scores of square miles in extent, destroying all things therein! What must we think of beings who could deal with such elements on so large a scale, and yet be themselves, if not untouched, unharmed by the burning forces they employed! What stupendous powers are they capable of exercising! and what high functions, as ministers of wrath and as deliverers from destruction, are entrusted to them! On one day they enter a city, unobtrusively as any two way-faring men might enter; yet very early on the next day, the same beings, after escorting objects of mercy to a *place of safety*, are in the heavens above, flooding the

great plain with deadliest elements, and making it like a sea of burning sulphur.

What angels are able to do may be inferred from this instance of what they actually did. But though powerful, as executors of judgment, they were benignant and holy; and, in heaven, these two will be fellow-servants, co-worshippers, and loving companions with us, and with all who are and who shall be translated from the earth. The brief and terrible history of this judgment reveals the extent of the supernatural power with which, as agents of the Almighty, such angels are occasionally appointed to do His will. The power thus exercised was not their own; yet they so far held it ministerially that they said to Lot, when revealing the doom of Sodom, "We will destroy this place, * * * Jehovah hath sent us to destroy it."—Gen. xix., 13.

CHAP. III.

BALAAM AND AN ANGEL

SEVERAL Bible facts show that some angels may at the same time be visible to one man and invisible to another; and that to one and the same man an invisible angel may become visible. There may, however, be different classes of angels, for the two at Sodom were equally and at all times visible to all. We do not ordinarily see angels, even when, were they men, they would be sufficiently near to be seen. There are not such affinities between their spiritual bodies and our eyes of flesh as that any of them should be naturally objects of vision to us; so that it is only when, in a supernatural sense, our eyes may be said to be "opened," that we are able to see them. Several instances, in which angels appeared, establish and illustrate this truth. The first is in Num. xxii., and relates to Balaam.

The people of Israel, during their encampment in the wilderness, were intensely feared and hated by all the inhabitants of adjacent countries. The prodigies wrought on their behalf by the Almighty filled their enemies with astonishment and terror. As all the power of the Israelites was in the Lord their God, whom the heathen did not know, the king of Moab hoped, by the maledictory enchantments of a sorcerer of the highest repute, to disarm them. Balaam was believed to hold communications with pagan deities; and probably he had some knowledge of the true God. He was bribed to journey to a height from which the tents of all Israel could be *seen*, that he might there bewitch them with a divine *curse*; and two servants and several princes of Moab

accompanied him, to give state to his maledictory performance. Israel could not be harmed by his vain words, yet God interposed, and thus, through the heathen diviner, revealed himself to the king and people of Moab. An angel was sent forth from God to oppose the false prophet on his journey, and to constrain even him not to curse but to bless, and to utter a true prophecy. The angel stood in front of the party, but they, in the first instance, were unable to see him. He was first seen, not by the prophet, or by his servants, or by his attendant visitors, but by the beast of burden on which the prophet rode. Thus it is clear that angels may obstruct and frustrate our designs, by operating through secondary causes, even through so stupid a creature as an ass; and how much more so then by acting on the will of intelligent men! The angel appeared to the ass with a drawn sword in his hand. This was known from the attitude in which he afterwards appeared to the rider. To the ass the angel's form was not a spectral phantom or a shadowy shape, but an opaque and solid body, obstructing the way, and wielding a threatening instrument; for, as any beast would turn aside to avoid an obstructing body, the ass turned aside from the beaten path into the field. But the men saw no obstruction. The objects immediately in the rear of the angel would be hidden from the ass, owing to the presence of the angel's intervening body, but those objects would be visible to the men; for where the beast beheld an opaque form, they saw nothing but transparent air. When the ass had been driven back into the proper way the angel again went before them, and stood in a narrow path that lay through vineyards, and was walled on both sides, where the ass, being compelled by violence to proceed, and seeing that it was impossible to pass over the spot on which the angel stood, *attempted to force her way between the angel and*

the wall, and in doing so she bruised her master's foot. Again the angel retreated, and, the second time, to a place still more narrow, and which was so completely filled by his person as to be impassable to the ass. The poor beast, seeing in front the obstructing form—a form more formidable than that of man—with a drawn sword, and smarting under the repeated blows of her rider to compel her to proceed, sank to the ground in great pain, and in alarm and despair, whereupon she was severely beaten by the angry prophet, who suspected not the cause of the supposed perverseness of his beast.

During all this time Balaam and all they who were with him were blind to the presence of the celestial apparition. All earthly objects they saw as they are usually seen; the light, the clouds, and the sun were visible, and yet their eyes were closed to the superhuman form. Animal eyes indeed were not constructed to see such forms as those of angels. Departed spirits and some, at least, of the angels are as invisible as air; so that in the Greek language spirit and air bear the same name. But though we are naturally blind to that which is spiritual, He who formed the eye to see light can, at His pleasure, enable us to see angels and spirits. That power, being supernatural, must be His special gift. It is not certain that, in the case of any man, that gift was so ordinary an endowment as to enable him to see heavenly beings whenever they were near. The power was given on special occasions only, and for brief periods of time. On such occasions the gift was imparted and withdrawn without any sensation in the eyes of those who received it; they simply became conscious of being able, at the time, to behold supernatural visions. Thus the angel was seen by the ass at the time when he was not seen by the men; and thus Balaam was *afterwards* enabled to see him whom previously he could *not see*. The acquisition of that supernatural power is

expressly stated to have been from the Almighty. "Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his drawn sword in his hand."—Num. xxii, 31. These words show that the angelic manifestation was not owing to any change in the condition of the person of the angel, but to the new power of vision given to the man, who now, for the first time, saw him. The Lord opened his eyes. Previously he thought that he saw all things, but now he discovered that he had been blind to heavenly angels. A glimpse into a new world of beings was vouchsafed to him. The angel was not seen approaching from a distance, but was revealed to him at once. Suddenly he was confronted with a celestial and august apparition. A veil was taken from before him. All earthly things appeared as formerly, but to the earthly was now added the heavenly; and had other visitors from heaven been present, they also might, by the same new power, have been visible to him. No sooner did the prophet behold the angel than, struck with awe, he who had been provoked by the apparent obstinacy of his ass, and had inflicted heavy blows upon her, humbly and reverently bowed before him, prostrating himself on the earth. He "fell flat on his face."

How unconscious was Balaam, when guilty of cruelty to a dumb and irrational creature, that he was in the near presence of one of the princes of heaven, who, though unseen, witnessed every blow! That unseen presence teaches us that we also may, like the men of Moab, be observed by invisible beings, when we think not, and that their powers of perception are not to be judged of by our own.

After the unseen angel thus became visible to the prophet he addressed him in audible and articulate words. Doubtless he could have spoken to him as well when he *was unseen* as when he visibly confronted him;

and in that case Balaam would have heard vocal sounds from an unseen presence. The angel had a voice like that of a man, so that he must have had vocal powers ; he also heard all Balaam's words ; indeed no one speaks who does not also hear, the two powers being strictly correlative. We may infer that, inasmuch as the angel spake and heard on earth, he must be able to speak and hear in heaven ; and that as, during the interview, he held a conversation with a man, the angels hold conversations with each other, and also that in heaven there are vocal intercourse and vocal worship ; for what the angel in this instance did, all angels must also be able to do.

When the apostle Paul experienced a temporary translation to heaven, during which, as he himself said, when afterwards describing it, he could not tell whether his spirit was within or without the body, though his bodily life was continued, he heard "unspeakable words."—2 Cor. xii., 4. What he heard he could not repeat, nor was it consistent with the Divine will that he should make the attempt. But this angel's words were understood and could be repeated, and, having been written, they are now read. Paul speaks of the tongues of angels as though they were superior to the tongues of men.—1 Cor. xiii., 1. No man was ever so competent as he to speak of that superiority, for he was the only man that ever heard the language of heaven spoken in heaven, without ceasing to be an inhabitant of the earth. He wrote from actual and personal hearing. But this angel spake not to Balaam in the language of his native heaven. The prophet was addressed in his vernacular tongue. The language of heaven being unintelligible to him, the angel lips uttered only such words as were familiar sounds in his ears. Angels would seem to be universal linguists, for though no man knows *the tongue* of angels, the angels, in every instance in which *they conversed* with men, addressed them in the languages

of their country and of their time ; and as whatever angels do is well done, they would doubtless speak those languages correctly.

The angel's first words to Balaam were words of indignant remonstrance against his injustice and cruelty. "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times?"—Num. xxii., 32. Between an angel, an august prince of heaven, and an ass, a mere brute of the earth, there is very great disparity, yet the angel regarded the undeserved infliction of suffering with sympathy and with anger. His uppermost thought, at that moment, and his first words, did not relate to the grandeurs of the world from which he came, nor even to the mission on which he had been sent, they were unpremeditated words of expostulation on the cruel conduct of Balaam in striking the ass ; and while the angel thus censured the man he explained and vindicated the apparent perverseness of the ass. It is certain, therefore, that cruelty to animals, which is revolting to all the just sentiments and generous instincts of humanity, is also known by and is most offensive to the inhabitants of heaven.

Balaam had, in his anger, threatened the ass with death, and the angel told him that on account of this sin he himself had been on the point of being slain, and that the hindrance to his journey, in the persistence of the ass, had actually been the means of saving his life. Had the angel slain him, as he said, the cause of his death could not have been ascertained even by a *post mortem* examination, no indication of disease or of external injury being visible. He also said, "Thy way is perverse before me;" and again he said, "Only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that shalt thou speak." How great must have been the authority of this celestial being, who thus asserted his power and his right, at his discretion, to destroy a transgressor's life, and who thus spoke

representatively as though he were God! Before the journey was begun "God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, The word which I shall say unto thee that shalt thou do." Thus the command of God and that of the angel were almost verbally identical, so that the angel must have spoken as "the mouth of God." He represented God when he said, "Thy way is perverse before Me," and also when his threatening was held out and his command was given as though by God Himself. Balaam penitently said, in reference to the object of his journey—to curse Israel for a bribe—and to his obstinate persistence in attempting to advance when the angel stood in the way to oppose him, "I have sinned," and he proposed at once to desist and to return; but the angel directed him to proceed, and commanded him not to curse but to bless, and to speak, not as he himself might will, but as Divine inspiration should constrain him. Though the use by the angel of such words as "I" and "Me," in the name of the Lord, indicated high official dignity and power in him, as minister and representative of the Most High, we are not free to infer from those words that the angel was Divine, for they have sometimes been employed in a similar manner by human prophets.

CHAP. IV.

DESTROYING ANGELS.

THE destruction of the first-born of every family in Egypt, at the institution of the Passover, is repeatedly represented as the immediate act of God, to show how specially it was inflicted by Him; but His words to Israel, in Ex. xii, 23, "I will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses," show that an agent, other than Himself, yet under His absolute control, was employed on the occasion. The destroyer was not an element or a pestilence, but a person. The blood of the paschal lambs was sprinkled on the outer door frames of the dwellings of Israel, as the symbol of trust in the Atonement of the Lamb of God. In every instance the destroyer saw that blood, and he understood its import as a sign, and passed by every blood-sprinkled door. Not one Egyptian family, not any herd of cattle or flock of sheep, escaped the terrible judgment; but each death, being instantaneous, would be free from pain. The suffering was not so much in the death of any that died as in the great grief of those that lived; and the judgment being national, extending to every family, the whole nation would be mourners. No one could comfort his neighbours in their distress, for every one bewailed his own dead. Never was any country so filled with such anguish in so short a time as Egypt then was. The dreadful hour was midnight, when all the inhabitants were asleep; and there being a full moon in the very finest atmosphere and the most cloudless of skies, the destroyer's mission would be executed in brilliant moonlight, and amidst universal stillness. With what inconceivable velocity must he at that

hour have winged his way, visiting all the dwellings of Egypt, from the meanest cabin to the royal palace! No sentinel at Pharaoh's gate, no night watcher of the sick, no shepherd tending his flocks, and no observer of the stars traced the path or discovered the presence of the destroyer. No eye detected either wound or bruise on any of the dead; nor in a single instance could any natural cause of death be discovered. The person and the power of the destroyer were equally incomprehensible; the event, in all its dread aspects, was supernatural. What great capacities for rendering other services in obedience to the will of God, and for conferring great benefits upon men, must that angel possess, who, over so wide an area, and in so short a time, was able to inflict so great a judgment!

Though the destroying angel in Egypt was invisible, another, who was charged with similar functions at Jerusalem, was distinctly seen.—2 Sam. xxiv., and 2 Chron. xxi. The effects of the judgment he inflicted filled the public mind with distress and consternation. While fulfilling his mission he, like the destroyer in Egypt, was invisible. No victim saw the hand by which he was smitten; no survivor discovered the slightest indication of the superhuman presence in his house. Hour after hour a terrible power careered unseen through the streets, a power from which there could not be any concealment or escape; and the mystery added to the terror. At the earnest and public entreaty of David, God commanded the angel to suspend his work of death. "It is enough," He said, "stay now thine hand;" and that hand was instantly obedient to the Divine will. We cannot know how His commands are communicated to His celestial servants, for our ideas of modes of communication are limited to the functions and capacities of bodily organs.

Had any of the people of Jerusalem, at that time, been

possessed by the views and spirit of modern materialists they would have attempted to account for the numerous instant deaths, in which no symptoms of disease appeared, by the action of an "unknown law;" the ignorant and unmeaning jargon of unbelief; for unbelievers conjecture the wildest fictions, and prefer ignorance and uncertainty to Divine revelations of fact.

The angel was seen so soon as he ceased to destroy; but, as he was not to be an object of vulgar curiosity or of public terror, he became visible to very few. "David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem."—1 Chron. xxi., 16. That sword was either the weapon or the symbol of destruction, we know not which. The elders of Israel knew that the terrible presence was before them, and, like their king, they prostrated themselves on the ground. Araunah, a Jebusite, the proprietor of the land immediately under the celestial apparition, beheld the vision as he was threshing wheat, and he and his four sons fled to hide themselves; so great was their terror. The prophet Gad was not only conscious of the angel's presence, but became the medium of communication between him and the king. Had no one but David seen him, we might, owing to his great excitement and distress, have suspected the possibility of an optical illusion, but there could not be any illusion of the eye or of the imagination when, as in this case, identical phenomena were witnessed at the same time by several men. The people generally were not able to see the angel, nor could the best of our modern magnifying instruments, had they then been in use, have enabled them to discern his face, his form, or his sword. The power which only a few possessed, of seeing the angelic and immaterial form, must have been the *special gift* of God.

The extraordinary spectacle was not momentary, nor was it visible from one place only. The celestial figure stood like a statue, in fixed attitude, all the while the purchase of the land underneath him was negotiated and completed, while an altar was built and oxen were slain for a burnt offering, and while a sacrifice was offered to God; and the form thus seen in daytime was more brilliant than the daylight. Again and again would the eyes of the witnesses be turned, with instinctive terror, to gaze on the dread figure; and whenever, and from whatever direction they looked, they would distinctly behold him; neither their eyes therefore, nor their imaginations could have been deceived. The sword of burning, stretched out in token of threatening, was in his hand. He stood not on the earth, for they saw him "stand between the earth and the heaven." He required neither platform nor pedestal, nor any other material support, for he stood in the air. There were form and extension, two properties of matter, in his person, or he could not have been seen; yet he was not subject to the attraction of gravitation, like earthly elements. That invisible power which binds all earthly bodies to the earth, and which, balanced by the opposing and exactly equal force of momentum, binds to each central sun the whole cluster of planets around it, had no power whatever over him. It is conceivable that in the hierarchy of heaven there may be high angels, whose persons may be as brilliant and only less imponderable than solar glory. Such spiritual bodies as that of this angel alight on the earth's surface, not as solid bodies fall, nor even as winged creatures descend, but by acts of their will; and they move rapidly over the earth's surface, or leave it to proceed to some distant world, without effort, and unimpeded as sunbeams by atmospheric resistance.

The angel saw and heard David, as he penitently

confessed his sin and cried to the Lord in prayer; yet he spake not to him direct, but sent a message by the prophet Gad. Gad heard the angel speak, and understood his words, and probably, therefore, he was able to see as well as to hear him. There was deep repentance in the royal sinner, and, as the condition of Divine forgiveness, he was required to give a public and formal expression of faith. The angel commanded that the king should build an altar and offer a sacrifice. From this it is clear that the angel fully understood the meaning and prevalence of sacrificial offerings for sin. He selected the site of the altar, and thus, by his express command, that spot became consecrated to sacrifices for sin, until the one great sacrifice had been offered which all others set forth. The place was, at that time, Araunah's threshing floor, and David instantly bought it. Araunah was so impressed with the vision that he urged upon David to accept all that was required, free of cost; the land for an altar, his oxen for sacrifices, his corn for a meat offering, and even his threshing instruments as fuel for the burnt offering; but David, governed by even deeper emotions, refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him nothing. While all the preparations for the solemn and public oblation to the Deity were being made, the angel in the air above patiently waited, and attentively, yet silently looked on. When all was ready, the suppliant king, in the presence of all his court, "called upon the Lord;" and it was then that a visible miracle was wrought, for the Lord in heaven sent down fire, which fell upon the altar and consumed the sacrifice; just as, at the instance of Elijah, in a later age, fire came from heaven in demonstration of the existence of God, and to expose the folly of idolatry. The infliction of death on the sacrificial victims was a formal though silent confession of the king that he himself deserved to die; and the efficacy of the burnt offering

was owing to its reference to the great Atonement. This the angel saw and understood. Christ appeared representatively in that sacrifice, and through Christ mercy was extended to the guilty, and the hand of the destroyer was stayed. The seraphic form still continued to be visible, and the sword was still threateningly stretched forth over Jerusalem, as though to indicate that at any instant the angel's tragic mission might be resumed ; but as soon as the burnt offering had been completed, by the visible descent of celestial fire, God revoked the angel's commission to destroy ; and thereupon he, after the manner of men, "put up his sword again into the sheath thereof."

Though angels have been severally charged with offices of destruction, they have not been evil angels, but holy and loving, even as those who carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom ; for the ministering angels of love may become ministers of judgment. In this instance the object was to repress the spirit of national apostacy from God. The evil angels are "chained," or they might seek to turn every world of moral beings into a province of hell ; being placed under restraint, they can destroy only by tempting us to self-destruction. The destroyers were executors of the supreme behests of the Infinite One, whose will is unerring, and who is as holy and loving in punishing the sinful as in blessing the good. The one only cause of suffering in moral beings is sin ; and sin originated in the perverse exercise of that moral freedom which is the natural and necessary attribute of moral beings. Though "God is angry with the wicked every day," the angel is purely judicial, for it is "the wrath of the Lamb," to whose nature wrath is foreign ; wrath being to God a "strange work" and a "strange act."—Is. xxviii., 21. The safety of the good cannot be secured without *punishing the evil*. Punishment enforces conformity with

law, which is the beneficent guardian of life, rectitude and happiness; and it represses the lawlessness and anarchy which, if not checked, would turn the universe into a universal hell of misery. Heavenly angels, like God, delight in all the exercises of holy love; and they only punish when, from regard to public and universal good, punishment becomes a supreme necessity.

Immediately after the angel's disappearance, David declared that the house of the Lord should be built on the threshing-floor of Araunah, where the altar of burnt offering had been hastily raised. The selection of that site for the most sacred of all buildings was thus commemorative of this celestial apparition, and the building itself was monumental of its historical origin, so that the very spot over which the angel appeared could never be forgotten. It has been known in all ages, and is known to us even now; for it is certain that the site of the Mosque of Omar is that on which the temple stood.

Had David written a description of the countenance and form of the angel, it would have been greatly valued; but as the angel's mission had been occasioned chiefly by his own ambition and vain-glory, a sin in which, probably, his people also were partakers, in confiding in numbers and not in God, the remembrance of it would be too painful to him, even for reflection. His imagination, indeed, was so haunted with that remembrance that he was afraid to go to the tabernacle of the Lord, at Gibeon, lest he should again encounter the dreaded sword of the angel.—1 Chron. xxi., 30. Had David written to gratify human curiosity, he might have solved some of the queries which the narrative suggests; but the event so humbled and affected him that he made not the least allusion to it in any of his psalms.

CHAP. V.

ELISHA AND A HOST OF APPARITIONS.

“LEGIONS of angels” delivered Elisha from the power of the king of Syria, when that king’s army attempted to capture him at Dothan. A very small force might have sufficed to make the prophet a prisoner, had he not been protected by superhuman power ; for, not being a fighting man, he would not have offered any personal resistance. The king was greatly annoyed by the prophet’s revelations ; for though Elisha held no communications with any spy in the country, or any traitor in the council, he was well acquainted with all the king’s aggressive designs against Israel, immediately they were formed, and he thwarted those designs by revealing them to the king of Israel. The heathen Syrians had no true idea of the prophet’s character, or of the nature and source of his prophetic power ; they regarded him as being either a magician, whose science and art, being occult, were incomprehensible to ordinary men, or a necromancer, who received revelations from the spirits of the dead ; and with such a man they knew not how to deal otherwise than by military force. The king of Syria could not interpose between Elisha and the mysterious Power that revealed to him his very thoughts, but he hoped, by the capture of his person, to cut off his communications with the king of Israel ; and he therefore sent “horses, chariots, and a great host” to the place of his residence ; and the host encompassed the town, silently and by night, to make sure of their object, and to take him by surprise.

Elisha was not ignorant of the measures thus taken for

his capture. Yet he sought safety neither in concealment nor in flight ; he slept as calmly as though no foes were drawing nigh, and did not even inform his servant, a young man, of aught that was being done to make him a prisoner. The youth went forth for an early walk, when, to his great terror, he discovered a besieging force around the town ; and, hastening back to his home, with a sense of utter helplessness, he exclaimed, " Alas, my master ! how shall we do ? " To him resistance and escape seemed to be equally impossible, so that the sight of the invaders filled him with dejection and despair. But the prophet, having faith in God, knew not fear. In this instance he walked both by sight and by faith. The sight was supernatural. He saw that, while earthly hosts had come to capture him, heavenly hosts had come to protect him ; yet he went not forth to gaze on either his assailants or his defenders ; but, to reassure his disquieted servant, he said, " They that be with us are more than they that be with them. " Similar consolatory words were addressed to the people of Jerusalem by Hezekiah, when they were dismayed by huge hosts of invaders from Syria ; but Hezekiah referred to One, even the Almighty ; Elisha, however, referred to many, his angel servants. As by numbers the young man was dismayed, by greater numbers did his master comfort him.

Who then were the guardian hosts whose number exceeded that of the assailants ? and what were they ? They were not the men of Dothan, for the citizens were non-combatants. Whoever they might be, security could not be had in the greater number unless that number were as near to defend as the other were to assail ; but the terrified youth could not anywhere see them. Indeed not even a solitary sentinel was in sight, to sound an alarm of invasion, and still less were there present *preponderating hosts of* defenders ; so that the young

man's eyes contradicted his master's reassuring words. Doubtless he thought their protectors could be with them only by being near to them : and yet they were not even visible.

The prophet's words, however, were not vain words. He did not attempt, at this great crisis, to delude himself or his servant with phantom hopes. Humanly speaking, they could hope for safety only by the marshalled hosts of Syria being encountered by more numerous hosts and by stronger force ; and so, as no human aid was in view, escape appeared to be impossible. Thus the prophet's words only added perplexity to the young man's terror. The invaders were near and visible, while all defenders were absent ; what then could be meant by the greater numbers that were with them, when there were none whatever ? The young man desired to see them with all their engines of war, as plainly as he saw the Syrian hosts ; but to him they all were distant, and he could not discover any indications of their approach.

Elisha's spirit was perfectly serene while his liberty and life seemed to be in peril, and while his servant was troubled on his behalf. He knew that the protecting hosts were near, though to his servant they seemed nowhere. He was not surprised at their presence, for he had seen superhuman forms and forces before. His first vision of celestial beings was at the ascension of Elijah ; who predicted that, should such a sight be vouchsafed to him, it would be a sign that a double portion of the prophetic spirit would be given to him. To his astonishment he then saw, not only Elijah's person borne upwards from earth to heaven, but the angels also, who, as though they had been horsemen and in chariots of fire, escorted him away. By that supernatural sight he became a "seer," one who could spiritually see ; and at this crisis at *Dothan* he still possessed the power of spiritually seeing.

Indeed that power would appear to be given even now, in some instances, to the dying, in their last moments. Elisha prayed that this young man might see the vision which he himself saw. How direct and how brief was his prayer! "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see." In an instant that prayer was answered. "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw." And, what a sight! Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

This narrative, though brief, is suggestive; much being implied though little is stated. The fiery hosts are described, not in reference to their nature, but to their appearance. They were not constituted of burning elements; and no natural object was subject to any burning action from their persons. They were seen in daylight, but their forms were brighter than sunshine, being forms of celestial fire. Angels are repeatedly described as having a dazzling aspect, with shining garments, and faces like lightning.—Dan. x. 6, Matt. xxviii., 3. When Daniel had a vision of the Ancient of Days the innumerable angels before him, at a distance, appeared as "a fiery stream," just as the nebulae of countless suns in our dark heavens form a stream of light, "the Milky Way."

There are creatures beyond our comprehension, and elements have recently been discovered, of which, previously, men had no knowledge. Suns are surrounded with oceans of splendour, of the nature of which we are ignorant, and for which, though it diffuses its beneficent influence over their groups of worlds, we have not a name. If organic beings inhabit the suns they must be altogether unlike and superior to us, just as suns are superior to the dark, cold planets which they illuminate, warm, and vivify. All such worlds must be surrounded with perpetual sunshine. There cannot be sleep where there is no night; and consequently there cannot be any of the necessities

which seek relief in sleep. If the glorious suns be inhabited it must be by glorious forms. But heaven itself, which is God's "glorious high throne from the beginning," must transcend all other worlds in magnitude and in grandeur, and be inhabited by beings who are incomparably superior to us, even as that world is superior to this.

The fiery hosts of Dothan can be imagined only as they appeared. They were very unlike all earthly beings. When they covered the mountain, their presence did not, in the eyes of those who could not see them, obstruct the sight of any natural objects thereon. Both citizens and soldiers saw every plant, tree, and moving creature as distinctly as if the hosts had not been there. No earthly creature could naturally perceive them; nor are we able to imagine the nature of creatures whom—being impalpable and invisible as the incense of flowers—our senses cannot know. Indeed it is to Revelation that we owe the very knowledge of their existence. By opening this young man's eyes the Lord introduced his mind into a perfectly new world of holy, intelligent, and powerful creatures—a world that is indescribable in human speech; for only in their own language can such beings be described. The fiery-looking forms, though immaterial, appeared to him in military array; to show that their errand on the earth was one of protection.

The hosts thus supernaturally revealed were real. They were not like the phantoms of the imagination, of science, or of art; the vision was not a dissolving view or a magic lantern show. The prophet did not pray that his servant might be deceived by some optical illusion; nor did the Lord deceive him by a sight of hosts which had no existence. Elisha had distinctly affirmed that defenders were *with them* whose existence was as real as that of the *beleaguering* hosts, and whose numbers were greater.

"They that be with us," he said, "are more than they that be with them." This was not fiction, it was matter of fact. Who or what they were that were with them he stated not; nor did he attempt in any way to describe the indescribable. When they were unseen by the young man they were there; for the prayer was not that they might come, but that they might be seen. Even had Elisha not seen them, their existence and their presence would not have been the less real. The vision was extraordinary, but it cannot be said that their presence on the earth was also extraordinary. We do not know that such beings are present with us, but neither do we know that they are absent. Our "outward man" sees only the outside world. There are not such correspondences between their nature and ours as that we should naturally be able to see them. But Elisha must have been enabled to see them, for he did not ask that his own eyes might be opened. He spoke of their existence and of their number as though he himself had been fully cognisant of both; and what he saw he desired that his servant also should see. That servant saw every opaque object, but to the immaterial he was as altogether blind as we all are. The adjacent hill was as near to him as to his master, but, until his eyes were opened, it was to him as a solitude; while in the eyes of Elisha, who could "spiritually discern," it was covered with living and militant forms.

To many material forms of life all past generations were blind, yet to the men of modern times such forms of life are daily visible. Gazing on stagnant water they saw not the millions of living creatures therein, swimming, feeding, fighting; yet through the microscope we see them. Daylight conceals the distant suns which darkness reveals. And there are innumerable groups of suns in the infinite realms of space, which no unaided eye can at any time

see, but which with adequate aid may be seen in darkness by any one. Thus worlds of living creatures and worlds of stupendous magnitude are concealed from human vision, the former by their infinitesimal littleness, the latter by their immeasurable distance. All these were invisible worlds until, by the works of human art, the Lord opened our eyes. The existence of these worlds is as inconceivable, and to some who have not seen them, as incredible, as can be any purely spiritual phenomena to the materialist. But the celestial hosts were not inconceivably minute like animalculæ, nor inconceivably distant like nebulæ. They were large as men, and their horses and chariots were of the ordinary sizes. All were on the adjacent hill, and the hill was covered with them; but even in the sunshine they were invisible as the stars to all but Elisha; and no optical instrument, however perfect and powerful, could have enabled any man to trace the outlines of those heavenly hosts, or even to discover their presence, unless "the Lord opened his eyes."

From this and other Bible narratives it is clear that God has occasionally given a new capacity to the human eye. Only "He that formed the eye" can give to it new and additional powers of sight. Very great must have been the surprise of the servant at his master's prayer, for though his vision was perfect, he heard Elisha say, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see." Yet how much greater still must have been his astonishment when, in answer to that prayer, "the Lord opened his eyes," and he actually saw as he had never seen before; and saw, too, what none of us can hope to see in this world! No mechanical operation was performed on his eyes. No visible power so touched them as to cause sensation. And yet at that moment, unconsciously to *him*, the direct agency of the Almighty acted on his eyes, *and gave to them a supernatural power*, so that "*legions of angels*" instantly became visible.

The angelic legions, in visiting the earth, and in being revealed to two privileged men, are revealed to us. They came on an appointed mission, which, before their departure from heaven, they well understood, and that mission gave to them a military array. They must have arrived from their native world during the previous night, or early in the morning, seeing that the hosts they came to oppose had only just arrived. Nothing indicated their presence to the outer world; and therefore the absence of such beings must not be inferred from the absence of phenomena. Our senses, in well known instances, are so deceived that the impressions of sense have to be corrected by reason; and in other instances, equally well known, there is no capacity in our senses to judge or to know. New worlds of spiritual beings might, if God so willed, be at any time opened to us, as one was opened to Elisha and his servant; and inasmuch as the celestial host became visible, not by any change in them, but by a new power or vision being given to those who saw them, the presence or the agency of such beings is not to be denied merely because we cannot see them. Even on earth powerful agents of life and death are invisible. This world is not the type of all other worlds, and still less of heaven, the greatest of all. The ideas of earthly beings are earthly; and men are unbelieving as though all actual existences were cognisable by sense, and as though nothing could have life, intelligence, and moral feeling but what has form, weight, extension, divisibility, and colour—the properties of matter. Practically, the materialists constitute their bodily organs the gauge of truth and of possibility, and by them they limit the power of the Almighty; yet even our own science, by frequent revelations, rebukes our ignorance, and shows how arrogant are its assumptions, and how illogical is its unbelief.

As this young man's eyes were closed until the Lord

opened them, so also are ours. We all are blind to the presence of living beings, other than those that are of this world. They may be as near to us as ordinarily we are to each other, though they are unseen. Such beings are as inaudible and impalpable as they are invisible. We hear no footsteps, no voices, no sounds of locomotion. Though the Syrian hosts saw not the hosts from heaven, and were unconscious of their existence, the narrative shows that they themselves were perceived by the heavenly hosts.

It were unreasonable to suppose that the visitors came from heaven merely to be seen by a youth. Their special errand evidently was to protect the Man of God, by making his assailants powerless to harm him; yet not destroying them. The prophet did not worship them or pray to them, but in their presence he prayed to God to disarm the invaders by temporary blindness, and his prayer was immediately answered. Instant and total blindness reduced all the assailing force to a condition of pitiable helplessness. The presence of the celestial army, in military array, shows that in this judgment they were agents of the Lord. To execute His behest they would descend from the mountain on which the young man saw them, they would surround Dothan co-extensively with the invaders, and would smite the eyes of the Syrians. Their weapons were not carnal; they were superhuman, and unlike the human. How diversely the Almighty has acted on human eyes! When, on the morning of His resurrection, Christ walked and conversed with two disciples, "their eyes were holden that they should not know Him."—Luke xxiv., 16. In many instances, as in that of Elisha's servant, human eyes were opened to see the naturally invisible. But at Sodom and at Dothan *men* were supernaturally deprived of sight. The Syrian *officers and privates, infantry, cavalry, and charioteers,*

all, without exception, were struck blind. The act was instantaneous and simultaneous. In ordinary cases blindness is caused by mechanical violence, by chemical action, by the curtain of cataract, by inflammation, by paralysis, and by natural decay; but how in any instance, and still more in a host of instances, blindness could be caused without pain, without any natural cause, and by angelic agency, is what cannot be understood. To ask how it was done were to ask how miracles are wrought. The blinding action of the heavenly hosts was as invisible as the hosts themselves.

What a dreadful calamity must this sudden and universal blindness have been to the whole army! Their power for evil was paralyzed; no one could aid his comrade; no officer could enforce obedience, no private could obey. Every man required a guide, but no man could find one. All round the city were hands put forth in the morning sunshine, groping as in blackest darkness or in densest fog. Like the Egyptians during the three days of supernatural darkness, no man would venture to move from his place. They felt that a supernatural, mysterious, and dreadful power was upon them, and in bewilderment, despair, and mortal fear, every man stood still, and all might have perished.

All this was done for the safety of one man. How precious, then, must have been that man's life and liberty in the sight of the ministering angels, and of Him who sent them! and how completely were all the soldiers now at the mercy of Elisha and the men of Dothan! They might all have been slain without the least resistance; yet not one of them was hurt. The sequel is soon told. Elisha became their guide, and conducted them to the king of Israel, who heartlessly desired to destroy them; but the prophet restrained him. At the instance of Elisha the Lord eventually restored sight to them all, as

instantaneously as it had been taken away ; and, by command of that servant of God, the king offered them bountiful hospitality, and then bade them to depart. They then returned to their own country, where all men must have listened with amazement to the narrative of their marvellous experiences in the land of Israel ; and their king, disconcerted by a Power which he could neither resist nor understand, at once desisted from all further aggression upon the "peculiar people" of the Lord.

The appearance of these militant and mysterious hosts suggests some queries as to their nature, their powers, their conditions of life, and their history, but to these queries no answers can be given, so long as we dwell in "houses of clay." It might be asked, too, whether this was their first visit to our world, and whether it was their last. Where were they before they visited the earth ? and where are they now ? Did they all come together ? and did they all return together ? Over what realms and distance in space, and with what velocity did they pass ? and what period of time elapsed from their departure from heaven to their advent on earth ? What was their aggregate number ? Were they all subject to the "chief princes," of whom an angel spake to Daniel ? Were all known to each other, and by name too ? Was the presence of so many necessary for the work to be done ? or was the greatness of the multitude intended to reassure an alarmist, who could appreciate the power of many, but not the power of one ? How long did they remain on the earth ? And, finally, while human generations come and go, and endless time runs on, how are they employed ? For fuller revelations respecting these great and holy beings we wait until, being absent from the body, and being in other than our present conditions of life, we and the angel hosts shall *live in intimate and loving communion.*

CHAP. VI.

ISAIAH'S VISION OF SERAPHIM.

THE prophet Isaiah was favoured with a sublime vision of angels and of God.—Is. vi., 1-3. The scene was in the temple, and where the altar of burnt offering was, so that it could not have been in the holy of holies, there not being any altar there, but must have been in the holy place, where was the altar, and where the priests daily ministered before the Lord. The prophet was alone. Jehovah appeared to him as a sovereign on a throne, which was “high and lifted up,” and “His train filled the temple.” The high throne was the symbol of divine supremacy, and the flowing regal robe was the symbol of grandeur. Others also, who were not of this world, were present in this manifestation of God; and Isaiah distinctly heard their praises, and saw their glorious forms. The forms, though symbolic, were those of real persons, and their praise was in words which a mortal not only heard but understood. They had descended from heaven; and there may now be heard the very voices which then resounded in a house built by human hands. These worshippers were seraphs; a name denoting fire, as though, in loyalty and love to God, they might be said to be burning ones. Distinct outlines of superhuman forms were before the prophet, not standing, as men might stand, on the temple floor or on any solid surface, for their bodies, being heavenly, were not governed by the laws of material worlds. They stood above the throne, or “round about” it, as the Septuagint version reads; and yet while standing they were in the attitude of flying; for each seraph had

six wings, with which he covered his face and his feet and did fly. These symbols of velocity are in some instances attributed to angels as they are to other creatures, and even to time, to the earth, and to God. The wings and their action were, in the case of the seraphim, symbolical not only of velocity but of humility and reverence. It is not stated how many of the celestial ministers were present, the name seraphim being simply plural. Their employment was that of worship. They did not, however, directly address Him whom they adored, but cried to each other, in mutual and alternate responses, each one's solo consisting of a word; for, as though the mind of each was full of one idea, each one cried out "holy," and when the word "holy" had been proclaimed by each of the seraphic choir, they all united in one chorus, exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"—hosts of heaven—"the whole earth is full of His glory."

When the prophet had seen the vision and heard the adoring cry, he said, in the hearing of the seraphs, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts;" and, doubtless, so far as the Lord could be seen by human eyes, He was then seen, but personally and properly He was not seen, and could not be; for Christ, speaking of such visions of God, said, "No man hath seen God at any time."—John i., 18. As Isaiah does not describe any Divine form, it may be inferred that no such form was visible. The prophet saw only the manifested glory of God, and His train as a robe of glory, but Him he saw not. Form belongs to bodies, not to spirits. God has no form or parts; His essence being as invisible as it is inconceivable. No creature can comprehend the Infinite Spirit, still less can any by searching find out Him to perfection.

The glory which Isaiah saw was, he affirms, the glory of *Jehovah*; but John declares that in this vision the

prophet saw the glory of Christ, and spake of Him (John xii., 41); while Paul, in his parting words to the chiefs of the unbelieving Jews at Rome, quoted the words addressed to Isaiah by Jehovah, as being those of the Holy Spirit.—Acts xxviii., 25, 26. These three inspired testimonies are not contradictory; in the doctrine of the Divine Trinity they all perfectly agree. The visible glory was that of one, even of Jehovah, and not that of two Gods, and still less of three. We have therefore the concurrent testimonies of Isaiah, John, and Paul, that Jehovah and Christ and the Holy Spirit are one.

Over the mercy seat in the temple there was a visible presence of the glory of God, but as none but the high priest was permitted to enter the holiest of all, where the mercy seat was, Isaiah never saw that glory. The glory that he saw was on the throne. Sinful man worshipped before the mercy seat, and there he offered atonement for sin; but holy angels worshipped before the throne, and the holiness of God was the subject of their praise. On the occasion of Isaiah's vision the high and holy worship of heaven was transferred to the temple, which was "a figure of the true" (Heb. ix., 24); and, as Isaiah was permitted to be present, he left us, as part of our precious heritage of truth, a brief narrative of the scene which was such as no other mortal ever saw in any earthly house.

The voice of praise from the heavenly seraphim caused the door posts of the temple to move, as with emotion; and a cloud filled the whole building. While the sinful man gazed on the supernal scene, and listened to the seraph's song of praise, he thought of himself only as a sinner, and, looking on his own moral uncleanness in the light and glory of the presence of God, and of the seraphic ministers, his dismayed heart sank within him, and in the spirit of self-condemnation he said to himself—"Woe is me! for I *am undone*, because I am a man of unclean

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."—Is. vi, 5. In the presence of Infinite Holiness his sin, and he himself also as a sinner, appeared to be most impure and loathsome. "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance."—Ps. xc., 8. Just as when sunbeams shine through a window, particles of dust, indivisibly minute and almost infinitely numerous, and which would be undiscoverable in the shade, are revealed to us, floating in the air we breathe, so innumerable impurities of the human heart, which that heart knew not, are revealed to it when it views itself in the light of the glory of God. "Behold, I am vile," said Job, as he stood before God, "what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth;" in token of his being silent and speechless.—Job xl, 4. At another time he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."—Job xlii, 5, 6. When Abraham was permitted to hold a solemn conference with "the Judge of all the earth," as a human form, he said, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes."—Gen. xviii., 27. I am dust, for I am made of dust, I sprang from dust, I subsist on dust, I am polluted as dust, and to dust I return. Not only am I dust, I am ashes, the refuse of that which once was better, being debased by sin. At the solemn moment when Isaiah saw the ministering seraphim and the glory of God, the words of God to Moses—"Thou canst not see My face; for there shall no man see Me, and live" (Ex. xxxiii., 20), would seem to have been present in his mind, for, having seen the glory of God, he expected instantly to die. Standing before the glory of Jehovah, and of the *holy ones from heaven*, who covered their faces before the

insupportable Presence, he felt himself to be on the point of dissolution, and feared lest he should die in his sins, so that, interrupting the worship of the holy seraphim, he cried aloud, "Woe is me, for I am undone," I perish in my sins, "because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

The prophet's consciousness of sin made it impossible for him to join in the worship of the seraphim. His unclean lips could not sing, "Holy is the Lord of hosts." His wail of penitence and fear instantly succeeded their cry that God was holy. His lips were unclean because he had an unclean heart. The holy seraphs, as they worshipped God, saw the frail and sinful man, self-convicted and self-condemned, standing silently by; they beheld his emotions depicted on his countenance, as, struck with awe, he gazed on the glory which appeared on the high throne; and when he spake they heard his exclamation of penitential anguish and terror. What words of sin and death were those for such holy beings to hear, who had been wont to hear only holy praises from the voices of holy ones like themselves in heaven!

But the house in which they now were was a house of mercy for the sinful; for in that house was the mercy seat of God. There the sinful daily inflicted death on sacrificial victims, as practical and silent confessions that they themselves were justly condemned; and there the blood of atonement was offered, so that through Him whom that symbol set forth, forgiveness might be obtained; and, as "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," the seraphim must have listened with loving sympathy to the wail of the lone, contrite, and trembling man. His cry of self-condemnation and of fear of instant death, as the consequence of his vision of the glory of God, was not disregarded by

the Lord; one of the compassionate seraphim was authorised to assure him of the Divine forgiveness, and of the purification of his soul from sin. This was expressly stated to him; "Thine iniquity," said the angel, "is taken away, and thy sin is purged."—Is. vi, 7.

The revelation of an act of mercy on the part of God was not only expressed verbally, but was also denoted by a symbol. The facts show that Isaiah was not forgiven by simple prerogative, as an act of the Divine will, but a medium and an agency were employed, a distinct reference being thus made to the atonement for sin. Sin could not be pardoned or purged away consistently with the holy law that condemned it, without a recognition of the Great Sacrifice for sin, by which its malignity was impressively set forth, and the authority of violated law was asserted and upheld. Every day the atonement of the Son of God—the central fact in the history of this world—by which the pardon of sin was made compatible with law, was depicted on the altar in burnt offerings and in blood. That altar was now in the presence of the seraphim and of the glory of the Lord, and had relation to the holiness of the Divine government, and to our salvation from sin. They saw the fire burning thereon, which never went out, and the seraph who pronounced the absolution of the prophet, taking the iron tongs from the altar in his angel-hands, lifted a live coal from the fire and applied it to the unclean lips of the prophet, who neither fainted nor fled as he approached. The power that grasped and used the tongs must have been equal to muscular power, like that of the human hand. The coal from the altar would be charcoal, or wood, not fossil coal, for the fuel was wood; and charcoal, being very porous, might be touched near to the red-hot with impunity, so that the unignited part of the "live coal" from *the altar* might touch the lips without pain or injury.

By this symbol the connection between the forgiveness of sin and the use of the altar of sacrifice was distinctly shown, and in this act of the seraph the atoning work of Christ was also signified.

The conduct of the seraph, while adoring God, in applying the live coal from the altar to the lips of a sinful man, and his exposition of the evangelical meaning of that symbol, showed his deep sympathy in the sinner's salvation, and how well he understood the doctrines of the Gospel—"which things the angels desired to look into."—Pet. i., 12. The angels deeply ponder the wonders of infinite love, in the restoration of our lost world in harmony with the law that condemned it. They had seen "the end of the law for righteousness" answered, in the perpetual exclusion of their fallen peers from heaven; and they saw the same end of law attained in the redemption of men. Here then was a new revelation to them of the character of God, in dealing with a race of transgressors. The punishment of lost angels supplied a motive to fear, but the salvation of men supplied a motive to adoring gratitude and love; while the event itself, as affecting the destinies of innumerable millions, would be regarded with deepest interest. Their object in descending from heaven, and the object of Isaiah's vision and record of their conduct are equally important and clear. While they showed to sinful man, in the instance of one trembling sinner, by what means iniquity is pardoned and sin is purged away, they all proclaimed the holiness of God, in the house in which the mysteries of atonement were transacted, and in the very act of saving the guilty. God is holy in punishing sin; and, through Christ, He is not less holy in pardoning it; both acts being equally consistent with the authority of law, and with the prevention of sin. In no other world may they have witnessed such a development of the Divine

government, such stupendous issues of good and evil, and such a gift of eternal life to creatures justly condemned to die. In pardoning sin God does not act against the law which condemns it. He is supremely holy in His acts of mercy, for the Atonement vindicates His holiness, and the sacrifices on the altar set forth that Atonement. Thus in the very house of mercy, and while bestowing the very gifts of mercy upon the guilty, all the seraphim proclaimed, before the grandeurs of His throne, and in order that the declaration might come down through all generations, that God is holy, and that by His acts of pardoning and purging away sin through Christ, the glories of His holiness fill the whole redeemed earth.

CHAP. VII.

ANGELS WITH LIONS AND IN FIRE.

ANGELS delivered servants of God, in Babylon, from the power of lions and of fire. The ruin of that city has so long been so complete, that its very site was unknown to many generations; and its perpetual desolation is a standing monument of the truth of ancient prophecy. When the prophecies of its ruin were written, Babylon was the magnificent capital of the proudest and most powerful of the ancient monarchies; yet those prophecies are all fulfilled to the letter. At that time Jerusalem was a ruin, the chief of the inhabitants were captives in Babylon, the Divine Shekinah had disappeared, all sacrifices and public worship had ceased, the temple was destroyed, the faithful servants of God were a crushed and scattered few, idolism was triumphant over true religion, a pall of deepest moral darkness covered the minds of men, and centuries had to elapse before the Sun of Righteousness should rise. But in that darkness "morning stars" from heaven occasionally appeared; and, in truth, if supernatural manifestations were ever needful it was then.

The first angelic appearance in Babylon was in a highly heated furnace.—Dan. iii. When the king had caused three men to be cast into the hottest fire that could then be made, he and all his ministers and attendants saw another with them in the furnace, who was not a man, who was their guardian, and who stood erect, and freely and calmly moved about unhurt; and they said that he was a God. He whom they thus saw was the ministering

attendant, in that extraordinary place, of the three faithful servants of the Most High, who, rather than bow down in worship before an image, at the decree of the heathen king, preferred to be cast into a fiery furnace; not knowing that they would be delivered. When the enchained victims were thrust into the flames, they beheld an angel of the Lord in the very midst, upon whom fire had no power, waiting to receive them. So fierce were the flames that the executioners were consumed as they cast them in; yet, though the fire melted their bonds, they themselves were unhurt, and, like the angel, they moved to and fro, not a hair of their heads or a thread of their garments being singed; and eventually they came forth in perfect safety, not having even the smell of fire upon them. Thus were they protected by Him who created all the elements of fire, and by whom all the laws of fire were ordained; and, in their immunity from the power of fire, the Almighty gave a public and most memorable demonstration of His own existence and supremacy, and of the folly of idolatry.

The immunity of an angel from the action of fire might arise from "the nature of angels," and thus not be miraculous, like that of men; for God "maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire."—Ps. civ., 4. Sometimes they appeared as men, and were mistaken for men, but they had not animal bodies like ours. As angels' bodies are so immaterial as not to be subject to the attraction of gravitation, they may be equally free from the operation of all other natural laws, such as are known to us, and consequently fire would be absolutely innocuous to them. Natural forces cannot operate upon any who are not natural beings; so that the presence of an angel in the fiery furnace, in absolute freedom from injury and pain, was less surprising than that of the faithful men *whom the idolatrous king intended miserably to destroy.*

No one witnessed the arrival or the departure of the angel. He was seen only in the midst of the fire. The three saw him and communed with him, during the whole time that they were in the furnace. As all the four walked freely in the midst of the fire, it is scarcely probable that, while in the burning element, the angel would be a silent apparition to the men. In the flames they would receive from him, as God's messenger from heaven, distinct expressions of the Divine approval and love, because of their fidelity, in the face of a most terrifying threat, and amidst almost universal impiety. Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation, consequent upon their deliverance, shows that their testimony confirmed that of his own eyes, that God sent His angel to deliver them; and his distinct vision of the apparition, and that of all his court, demonstrated to them that the perfect preservation of the three was not a contrivance of human art, but was the effect of Divine interposition. The angelic preserver of the three men, though not of this world, was as visible as they themselves were; and his presence was a sign that the natural action of fire on their bodies and on their garments was suspended by Him on whose behalf he appeared.

Thus, when true religion and the church of God were in the deepest and darkest adversity, heaven itself was supernaturally revealed in the very heart of the greatest city of the time, and before the eyes of the greatest of living monarchs and his attendants. Where no form of life could be supposed to be able to exist, and where an instant and horrible death was expected in the persons of three faithful martyrs, an inhabitant of the highest heaven, an "angel that excelled in strength," was beheld, visibly protecting them from the fiercest fire, amidst the clearest attestations of the reality and supernaturalness of the vision. *In this visible demonstration heaven and*

God were manifest, in the person of a representative, and through him God gave forth a silent yet most impressive protest against idolatry and persecution, and a vindication of Divine truth and human obedience. The angel, God's own ambassador, appeared as no other appeared before or since; and the proudest and most imperious of all human autocrats, whose word was law on the earth, and who had publicly defied the majesty of the God of heaven, publicly quailed in awe before the august presence, renounced the idolatry which he had attempted to enforce upon men; and, by prohibiting blasphemy against the only true God, under the penalty of death, made the worship of Him compulsory in the whole of his empire.

When the second angelic appearance was beheld in Babylon Darius was king. In this instance the scene was in a lions' den. The den would seem, from the use of such words as "taken up out of" it, to have been not a cage but a pit. Into that den, and among a number of savage lions, Daniel, the first Minister of State, was cast, as the penalty of his refusal to desist from prayer, and as the result of a diabolical conspiracy to destroy him. The lions were so savage that when, after Daniel's deliverance, the conspirators and their families were doomed to the fate intended for him, and were cast into the den, they caught and destroyed them in rapid succession as they fell, and even before they could reach the floor. But Daniel spent a whole night in that dismal and dangerous place, uninjured and untouched by any of the beasts; and in the morning he was taken up out of the pit in perfect safety.

The king had detected the plot of which Daniel was the victim, but not until it was too late to save him, without stultifying the royal authority. The night that Daniel spent with the lions was a very sleepless one to the monarch, and very early in the morning he went to the

den, where, fearing that Daniel had perished, yet hoping that he might still be alive, he cried out, not knowing whether he addressed the living or the dead, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Instantly an answer came up from the bottom of the den, and that answer was from Daniel, who said, "My God hath sent His Angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." That angel was even then with the prophet in the pit, though the king was not able to see him, nor did he depart until Daniel's deliverance was complete.

When Daniel was let down into the den he found there a celestial servant of God awaiting him. Among the lions he instantly beheld a visitor from heaven. It is more than probable that the lions also saw the heavenly vision, even as Balaam's ass beheld an angel. In that heavenly form they saw not an object of prey, so that they sprang not upon him to devour him. The extraordinary and august spectacle filled them with terror. They so quailed before that angel's form, in his robes of glory, that all their natural ferocity and appetite subsided within them. The very sight of him was a greater restraint upon them than the strongest chains. It was unlike any other they had ever beheld, and so long as that superhuman and awe-inspiring image was before them, their savage nature was cowed, they had no desire for food, nor any spirit or power to spring upon the most ordinary object of prey. With what terror would they gaze all through the night on the glorious form! Thus the supernatural power over the lions, for Daniel's safety, was in the superhuman presence. But the angel's presence, which filled the beasts with terror, was a visible guarantee of present safety to him, and filled him with emotions of wonder, *gratitude, and joy*. So soon as he beheld the

lions he also beheld the angel, though his enemies did not; and he instantly understood the errand of protecting love on which the heavenly visitor had come.

What a contrast there was between the angel's place of sojourn during that night, and the magnificent world whence he had come! and what a contrast between those savage brutes and the peers and princes of heaven whom he had left behind! From the evening twilight until the dawn, the celestial guardian and companion of the prophet abode with him among the savage creatures; and not until Daniel was lifted out of the den did the awe-inspiring apparition vanish.

How then did the angel and Daniel spend the eventful night? There would not be any sleep for the prisoner in such a place, among such creatures, and in the presence of such a deliverer from heaven. The two servants of the Most High could not have held so long an interview in silence. Were there no expressions of approving love on one side, and of gratitude on the other? Daniel well knew not only the loving errand on which his heavenly visitor had been sent, but also when and from whom he came; and they would undoubtedly converse, and possibly might even sing of the holiness and happiness of heaven, and of the infinite glories of God. How re-assuring and comforting to him, in such a horrible den, would be that extraordinary apparition which disarmed the savage beasts, and kept them crouching, motionless, and paralyzed with terror all through the night!

This narrative teaches a few most important truths. It shows that there is a Supreme Deity, who hears and answers prayer, who has not given up the world to "law," to chance, or to fate—the gods of the atheist;—and who deigns, not only to deliver empires, but to save individual men from mortal perils. It shows that there are *spiritual beings* denominated angels, and by consequence

that there is a spiritual or angel world; that the high and holy beings of that world are sometimes employed by God as His ministers in this; that the names, residences, conduct, and dangers of men, like those of Daniel, and that the plots of the wicked, like those of his enemies, are known in that world and by those angels; and that angels can reveal their presence to the consciousness and to the eyes of men, and can hold communion with men, even in a dreadful pit. This history also shows that the lions were enabled to see the angel's form, and that their strong and savage appetites and instincts were completely overcome by his presence and glory.

CHAP. VIII.

DANIEL AND ANGELS OF REVELATION.

THE prophet Daniel had several visions of angels, in which similar ideas are suggested by similar incidents. The first vision was on the bank of the river Ulai, now known as the Kerah, where he lived in the palace of Shushan; and it was in the day time and in the open air. A number of prophetic symbols having passed in rapid succession before him, the correspondences of which are found in ancient history, he heard the voices of invisible beings, who are denominated "saints," or holy ones. The words of the first one that spoke are not recorded; but the second, Palmoni, the wonderful numberer, inquired of the first how long the sanctuary should be trodden under foot; and the answer was given to Daniel. Both the speakers were near, and though they themselves were unseen Daniel heard and understood their words.

Immediately afterwards an angel, resembling a man, appeared to the prophet, and while before him he was addressed by an invisible being, who spake as from between the banks of the river, and said to him, in the hearing of Daniel, "Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision." The fact of a command being given to that angel by another shows that the unseen commander was of higher rank than he; and the fact that an inquiry was instituted by one holy one and answered by a second, shows that one angel had superior knowledge to another, and was able to answer his inquiries in reference to future events.

Angels have names. Even the-Infinite One deigned to reveal himself by a name, one which cannot be given

to any creature; for it implies self-existence and eternal existence, to which no creature can lay claim. Bible names are always descriptive names, and not arbitrary ones. Had God declared His name to an Englishman, and not to a Hebrew, it would have been in some English word, such as "the Eternal"; and had the name of Gabriel been given in English, it would have been "Man from God." The names Jehovah, Gabriel, Palmoni, and Michael may not be known in heaven, for Hebrew is not the language of angels; but personal names, as distinctive designations, may be useful in that world as in this. The name Gabriel, spoken from above by an invisible one, was equivalent to a declaration that the visitor was from heaven. In fire and among the lions no verbal authentication was required; for the presence of living ones in such places, unscathed by fire and untouched by the lions, was sufficient evidence that each of them was from God.

Gabriel's form was human, yet he was obviously super-human; indeed the prophet carefully notes the fact that he was only "as the appearance of a man." That appearance was not an optical or a spectral illusion; for it was that of an actual and living presence. Daniel distinctly beheld the outline of his form, the complexion of his countenance, and the robes he wore; he held conversation with the angel, and experienced sensation from contact with his hand. Thus the three senses of vision, hearing, and touch bore concurrent witness as to the reality, of the personal appearance.

In this interview the man and the angel appeared to be alone. The prophet's eyes were fastened upon his heavenly visitor as he approached. What thoughts and what tremblings of heart did this "appearance, as of a man," call forth in Daniel! Though the form was human no surroundings *could* cause a human being to be so awe-

inspiring as was Gabriel. Humanity faints in the presence of the superhuman. Its weak, ignorant, and timid heart instinctively quails with undefinable apprehensions, when in immediate contact with one from the unseen world. Though by one angel Daniel had been delivered from lions, yet at the appearance of another he was afraid; nevertheless he was not a coward from conscience, nor had he any fear for his life. But the mystery of the supernatural so unmanned him that for a short time he was paralyzed by the celestial presence; and, sinking to the ground, he lay prostrate on his face, in a state of temporary unconsciousness.—Dan. ix., 23.

What a scene was that! A man of God, known and beloved in heaven, lay in the open air, in a fainting fit, superinduced by the sight of an angel. His greatest enemies could not convict him of any fault, except that of refusing, at any peril, to abjure his conscience and God. He had spent a night in a den of lions, visibly attended by a guardian angel. By revelation from heaven he had brought back to the memory of the proudest of earthly kings, a prophetic dream which the dreamer had forgotten, and he had interpreted it. In the presence of a king and a thousand of his lords he had deciphered an inscription, written by the visible hand of an invisible being, on the palace wall. And, by his extraordinary endowments and high character, he had been elevated from the position of a foreign captive to the high dignity of premier of the one great empire of the earth. While this holy and distinguished man swooned before the overpowering presence of a prince from the world of angels, and lay on the ground as one who was asleep or dead, the glorious one stood bending over him in benignant and compassionate love; for his bodily presence and the sound of his voice had been too much for frail humanity to bear.

It might have been supposed that in such a case the angelic presence would have been withdrawn until the prophet's consciousness had returned and his strength was recruited, and that then, when his spirit was more tranquil, the angel would gently re-appear to fulfil his mission. But, instead of retiring, the angel drew nearer to him, and celestial hands tenderly and reassuringly touched the prostrate and unconscious man.

Daniel felt the angel's touch. But the touch of a pure spirit he could not have felt. "A spirit hath not flesh and bones," said the Lord Jesus.—Luke xxiv., 39. Though those words convey a definite idea of a spirit, that idea is purely negative. The Lord has told us what a spirit has not, but what a spirit has or is He has not told us. How indeed could the nature of a spirit be described in human language, in which only combinations of pre-existing ideas can be expressed? When, after His resurrection, the disciples of the Lord were startled by His sudden appearance in their midst, in an apartment the doors of which were fastened from fear, and supposed Him to be a spirit, He undeceived them by inviting them to handle His body. They could not handle a spirit, nor could a spirit handle them. The angel in Daniel's vision, however, had a hand with the powers of the human hand. It had a substantive form; and as was the hand, such also must have been the entire person of the angel.

With what mortal fear would almost any man shrink from the face of such a being, and especially from his touch and the pressure of his hands! But that object of terror became a ministering angel, he undertook a helper's office of love in the time of need; and, as may well be imagined, with loving looks and gentle words he lifted the prophet and set him on his feet once more.

Upon Daniel's restoration the angel interpreted the

prophetic vision, which had previously appeared to him, and thus obeyed the command to make Daniel understand that vision. The interpretation then given was subsequently verified by great historical facts; for history is the paraphrase of prophecy. Though Daniel recovered consciousness and calmness of spirit, the memorable interview, and the revelation of great and impending calamities, affected him so greatly as for some time afterwards to make him ill.

This angel was not a phantom. He had a name, a form, a body, and an august and awe-inspiring presence; and Daniel beheld him for a considerable time after he recovered from the fainting fit, caused by his appearance. His body was substantial and palpable; he had hands, with strength to lift a fainting man and set him on his feet, and a voice to which the prophet listened for at least several minutes. The angel was possessed of super-human knowledge, for he was fully acquainted with all the prophetic symbols which had appeared to Daniel, and he so fully understood their signification that he minutely explained them to him, describing great national events, which subsequently came to pass, in language which the prophet immediately afterwards committed to writing. That writing, guarded and copied with jealous care by the best of living men in all ages, is still extant, and is universally read; and the histories of nations, having explained and fulfilled the prophecy of the angel Gabriel, have thus become monumental of the genuineness of the narrative of his appearance and utterances on the bank of the Ulai, upwards of two thousand three hundred years ago.

Five years later the same angel re-appeared to Daniel, who at once recognised his identity. May we not infer from that instant recognition that heavenly beings are *distinguishable* from each other, in common with all the

objects known to us? No two objects are exactly alike; each child brings into the world a new pattern face; and the varieties in all the realms of creation are infinitely numerous. If there were no corresponding distinctions among all the inhabitants of heaven, how could mutual recognition be easy or possible? When Gabriel first appeared to Daniel, the prophet distinguished him from the deliverer in the lions' den; and upon his re-appearance he saw at once which of the two had returned. The form and the countenance of him who had the "appearance of a man" were indelibly fixed on Daniel's memory; indeed the image of the great and holy one must have been frequently before his imagination during the five years' interval.

Whither had that holy one been during that interval? How distant had he been from this earth? and what worlds had he visited during those years? What scenes had been beheld by those eyes which now looked on Daniel? What other beings had heard that voice to which he now listened? How had that angel been employed during the interval of his two visits to the prophet? On how many other missions, and to what other races of moral beings, in God's infinite monarchy, had he been sent? At his first interview with Daniel he gazed on him as he lay in a deep sleep, but his own eyes never slept; for where he lives there is no weariness and no night. This was at least his second visit to the earth, it certainly was not his last (Luke i., 19), and on each occasion his identity was declared by the declaration of his name.

The object of Gabriel's second visit to our world was vocally to deliver an answer from God to Daniel's prayer. Being in great distress on account of the sins of his countrymen, and the terrible judgments inflicted upon them, Daniel *offered a most earnest intercessory prayer.*

He abstained from food, as one who could not eat; he clothed himself in sackcloth, and laid ashes on his head, in token of deep humiliation before God; he made confessions of national sin, and, with great fervour, he besought Him to have mercy on the surviving remnant of Israel, and to restore them from captivity to their own land. That prayer, though offered in the privacy of his own chamber, was heard in heaven. It was known by angels that Daniel was praying. Thus the moral actions of men on earth appear to be known, and to be instantly known, among the inhabitants of heaven. The prayer was not a long one, for it was one continuous act, and in summary it is contained in nineteen verses. When that prayer was begun Gabriel was in heaven; before it was ended he was on earth. The whole distance between heaven and earth was traversed while the petitioner was on his knees; and, though present before the Divine throne when Daniel first knelt in prayer, the holy one was near to him, touched him, and addressed him, while he was still pleading with the Lord. The prophet, as though astonished at the quickness with which the angel had come, and as though he knew how distant heaven was from the earth, accounted for the velocity of his flight by stating that he was "caused to fly swiftly."—Dan. ix., 21.

Gabriel flew. Had he wings then with which to fly? His human appearance, and his being described as a man show that he had not. Only metaphors and poetry give wings to angels. The emblematic images of cherubim over the mercy seat had wings; and the seraphim in Isaiah's vision of God in the temple had each six wings.—Is. vi., 2. John beheld angels flying through the midst of heaven (Rev. viii., 13, and xiv., 6); and Ezekiel speaks of angels whose wings were full of eyes.—Ezek. x., 12. *Even God Himself*, who, being omnipresent, does not go

from one place to another, is said to have wings.—Ps. xvii, 8, lvii, 1, and xci, 4. The wind has wings (2 Sam. xxii, 11), riches have wings (Prov. xxiii, 5), the morning has wings (Ps. cxxxix, 9), and even the earth has wings (Job xxxvii, 3). We commonly speak of time as flying. Even women are said, in Zech. v., 9, to have wings. But in all these and similar instances, the language is obviously that of metaphor. None of the objects now named are winged like birds; and there really is no reason to suppose that even angels have wings. Wings are useful only as means of locomotion through such resisting elements as air; and they are useful only to such creatures as those of earth. But in heaven, and in the realms of infinite space, wings would probably be useless. Though the imagination gives wings to angels, Bible facts show that they are wingless like ourselves, and that they are as Gabriel was before Daniel, “as the appearance of a man.”

The angel Gabriel flew swiftly. How swiftly is not stated. Were the locality and distance of heaven known, we might form some approximate idea of the velocity of his flight. But even in that case the idea could only be approximate, seeing that we know not how much time elapsed between his departure from heaven and his arrival on earth; and also that the earth and the whole group of worlds to which it belongs, while retaining the same relative distances from each other, are in constant and rapid motion through space, so that the distance of the earth from heaven may not be at all times equal. The idea expressed, being that of great velocity, implies the idea of great distance; so that heaven is not, as some men have supposed, in the atmosphere of the earth. Gabriel, it is said, was “caused to fly swiftly.” The cause of his swiftness was not in himself but in God. The Divine power enabled him, in obedience to the Divine will, to

appear quickly to Daniel, that he might quickly make known the answer to his prayer. Even while the prophet was praying, the messenger was speeding his course to Babylon! To estimate the velocity it would be necessary to know the measures of distance and of time, but we are ignorant of both; the first, however, must be great, and the second must have been brief. Our ideas of velocity are too mechanical and material to be applicable to the movements of angels and spirits. We know, indeed, that a minute quantity of electric fluid crosses the bed of the Atlantic ocean, along a line of wire, in a few seconds, and that in one second a ray of light traverses a distance equal to eight times the circumference of the earth's equator; but even light-rays may be left behind in an angel's flight from heaven to earth.

Gabriel encountered no resisting element in his progress through space, and consequently neither mechanical, nor muscular, nor any other known force could be in action. We can only imagine that the ordinary movements of a spiritual body like his are determined by acts of the will. But in this case the Divine power enabled him to travel with a velocity that was extraordinary even for him, for he was "caused to fly swiftly." In his journey from heaven to earth the same constellations would be visible to him as are visible to us; but at first he would see them from other regions. The Milky Way, that infinite realm of suns, whose numbers and whose distance cause them to appear in our sky as a faint haze of glimmer, might, in his progress, be resolved into innumerable constellations of suns. Were any of us to be present in any part of the path which he traversed, in his progress from heaven to earth, what a stupendous spectacle would the infinite space around us present! Darkness, silence, and solitude everywhere! yet everywhere specks of light, greater and less, indicating the

presence of great suns, with their complements of planets, moons, and comets, in every direction, the nearer being full-orbed objects of beauty, and the more distant sending forth star-rays which fade away into invisibility, until they are lost even to an angel's vision! Yet Gabriel, flying, was not lost in infinite space. He had no map of the universal monarchy, or of the solar system, or of the surface of the earth; yet with a knowledge of the locality of our sun and of the earth, and of Babylon, which was as unerring as instinct or as inspiration, he came in a direct and straight line to our world, and to the very spot where Daniel was. What numbers of other suns he may have left behind on that stupendous journey! Our electric messages to distant continents, and the messages of light from suns to suns, across the dark realms of the infinite, inconceivable though their velocity may be, would appear to be slow indeed compared with Gabriel's flight from heaven to earth, while Daniel prayed; and yet the being who passed so swiftly from the throne of God to the apartment in which Daniel was on his knees, had "the appearance as of a man." He stood before the prophet arrayed in the costume of man; but his raiment was from the wardrobe of heaven. So human was the appearance that Daniel called him a man, and so identical were the form, features, stature, and voice with those of the being he had beheld before, that recognition was instantaneous, and he describes him as "the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning."—Dan. ix., 21.

The angel first revealed his presence by a touch. He entered noiselessly, unannounced by a herald, with silent footstep, and unseen; but he touched the praying prophet as he poured forth supplications on behalf of Israel. The angel had hands, whose pressure could be felt; he had a visible presence in the light of day, for, being the time

of evening oblation, it was three o'clock in the afternoon; and he had an audible voice, and a perfect knowledge of the language of Daniel. He called Daniel by name, and declared that he was greatly beloved of God, and he announced the object of his visiting him to be to reveal a few of the great events of the future, and the time of advent and mission of Christ.

The answer so promptly sent to Daniel's prayer shows that prayers offered on earth are known in heaven; that angels may be deputed to convey messages to men; that they are so ready to obey the commands of God that they instantly depart from heaven at His word to visit the earth; that they are able to proceed from heaven to earth quickly, and almost instantaneously, as though earth were next door to heaven; that angels are employed on errands of love to men, and possibly to the inhabitants of other planetary and of solar worlds; that whatever they may in themselves be, and however they may appear to each other, to men they can appear as men; that they understand the languages of men, and can speak them audibly, intelligibly, and correctly; and that on special occasions they are made so fully acquainted with future events as to be able to reveal them.

But though on two occasions an angel stood before Daniel "as the appearance of a man," lowly, humble, and human, in familiar interview, so as to encourage confidence rather than awaken fear, in another instance Daniel was in the presence of an august apparition, which filled him with overwhelming emotion. For three weeks he had associated acts of self-denial with devotion; and at the end of that time a heavenly being appeared to him, as he was in the open air, by the side of the Tigris. The form in this instance also was human. No form of life, adapted to a moral and intelligent being, that is more *suitable or noble*, can be imagined. But the aspect presented

was altogether superhuman. The face was as the appearance of lightning. The same thing is said of an angel who appeared at the resurrection of Christ.—Matt. xxviii, 3. In each instance the word would seem to indicate not an hyperbole but a simple matter of fact. Were lightning a fixed phenomenon, like that of the sun, instead of being an instantaneous flash, its light would be blinding. What a face therefore must that have been which looked upon Daniel, and was immediately near to him, like a sun! And may it not represent very many such faces, as they appear in the world of angels? If so, how magnificent must the whole assemblage of such beings be! While the face of the angel was thus dazzling, the eyes appeared as lamps of fire, more resplendent even than the face. The body was like the beryl, or the emerald; the arms and feet resembled burnished brass; the garment was like white linen, the girdle like fine gold; while the voice was unlike the voice of a man, in volume and power it was equal to the voices of a multitude of men. This description resembles that of the glorified body of Christ, as beheld by John.—Rev. i, 13-16. So indescribable are all such beings in the languages of men that imagery was employed to aid the imagination; but even the imagery, being all of earth, forms an inadequate representation. The highest forms of humanity are not comparable with so august an angel as this, nor is the imagination able to form any adequate conception of the character, rank, powers, functions, or history of such a being.

Other men were with Daniel when this vision appeared to him, but it did not appear to them. Where he beheld a form of superhuman splendour, a face dazzling as lightning, and eyes of still greater brightness, they did not see anything; for the glory was not such as could be equally visible to all human eyes, like that of lightning

and of the sun. It was all of heaven. Daniel's eyes were opened to see it, theirs were not. Yet they were conscious, as by an instinct, of a mysterious and awful presence. A feeling of the supernatural fell upon them, so that they quaked in strange terror, yet knew not why; and in terror they fled from the place, lest some frightful spectacle should appear, and lest some invisible power should destroy them. Daniel feared not for his life, for the celestial being who stood before him was not a destroyer, having come not to inspire alarm, but to make revelations.

The truth of the angel's revelations was made certain to Daniel by the personal demonstration. Christ's attestations were not in the overwhelming splendours of His person, but in miracles. "The works that I do bear witness of Me," He said.—John v., 36. But this angel's witness was in himself. The indescribable magnificence of his own person was a visible demonstration as to who he was and whence he came. Had Christ's ordinary appearance been that of His transfiguration on the mount, when His face shone like the sun, and when His very raiment, from the power of His personal glory, became like robes of light, the awe-struck world would have recognised and been humbled by the presence of the supreme Divinity which made a temporary sojourn on the earth. He was in "the likeness of sinful flesh." The Deity dwelt in the opaque chrysalis of an ordinary-looking man; but this holy angel appeared on earth as he appears in heaven. No veil darkened his heavenly glories. He stood before Daniel as he was and as he is: and as are all the holy ones, his peers, before the throne of the Eternal, so he was before the prophet on the bank of the Tigris. In him Daniel beheld a pattern of them, *and what heaven is he might judge from what this angel was; thus from the unit he might imagine the appearance*

of the innumerable hosts. If such were the splendours of one heavenly being, what must be the congregated splendours of many! and since that one appeared so magnificent on earth, how must the whole heaven of such beings appear! We are familiar with the glory of our sun at the zenith, but there are countless other suns, many of which are greater than ours, so far away that the distance reduces their apparent magnitudes to mere specks, and causes their glories to reach us only in fragments, broken in their vast journeys, and twinkling in our night skies. Were all those suns visible and near to us, equally with our own, so that the stupendous concave which perspective forms around our earth were studded with suns, the aggregate splendours would be such as no form of animal life could sustain. And the glorious princes of heaven, were they equally visible and near as was this angel to Daniel, would constitute such a vision as would overwhelm us while we are in our weak and mortal bodies. Daniel did indeed on one occasion behold them, in a vision, at a great distance. Their numbers were countless, but, owing to the distance, their splendour was not dazzling. As innumerable distant suns appear in our heavens, like a broad faint stream of light, stretched over an infinite tract of space, in which each one is absolutely undistinguishable, so the vast array of heavenly hosts before the "Ancient of Days" appeared in the distance to Daniel. "A fiery stream," he says, "issued and came forth from before Him, thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him."—Dan. vii., 10. But as one sun that is near is greater to us than millions at a distance, so one such angel, in Daniel's immediate presence, was more overpowering to his senses and to his spirit than the innumerable hosts afar off.

The prophet was greatly affected by the vision. The

men that were with him having fled in vague terror, he stood alone before the awe-inspiring presence from heaven, and had no support in human sympathy. His heart and his flesh failed him. Being completely overcome by the unearthly grandeurs of the heavenly prince, he fainted and fell to the ground, in unconsciousness and in sleep.

What a contrast was then presented in this interview! There stood the image of celestial magnificence, and there, at his feet, lay an unconscious form of human weakness! One was the imperishable representative of all the princes of heaven; the other was the inhabitant of a "house of clay"; as a spirit from heaven once described the human body. Great glory appeared in the one; while, in the other, terror at the sight of the angel and at "the voice of his words," had produced deathly pallor and insensibility and had even caused his life to be in peril.

With what benignant compassion would that great angel look on the holy man that lay prostrate and unconscious before him, being unmanned by the splendours of his own presence! Surely he would now veil his manifested glories, or totally disappear, seeing how the frail mortal was affected by his presence! On the contrary, however, he drew still nearer to the man, he touched him and partly uplifted him. Daniel had only seen and heard the angel, but now celestial hands took hold of him. Like Gabriel, this angel had not only a voice, a face, a human form, and clothing, but he had hands that could feel and be felt, and strength by which, as by forces known to us, a senseless human body was lifted from the ground. Those hands were not human, neither could they have been those of a pure spirit, for a pure spirit has not any power, except by miracle, to lift an animal body, or to impart sensation to such a body by touch. The angel's hands were substantive forms.

In upraising the prophet the angel showed thoughtful

consideration for his weakness and safety. Had Daniel been at once set on his feet he could not have stood; he was therefore at first set on his knees and hands; then, as he recovered his senses and his reason, he was gently encouraged with loving words to stand erect:—Thou art greatly beloved in heaven, O Daniel. We know thee well, strangers though we are at present to thee, and we regard thee with loving sympathy. I came from heaven expressly to visit thee. Stand now on thy feet without fear, listen to what I say, and understand. Being thus encouraged with condescending, gentle, and loving words, Daniel strove to stand before his august visitor; yet he stood trembling from the natural emotion of fear; whereupon the angel added, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words."—Dan. x., 12. Thus he was assured that when no sign appeared, and no voice from heaven broke silence, in response to his unceasing prayers of many days, those very prayers, which seemed to die away unregarded, were heard in heaven, and had evoked this visit of a glorious angel.

Though the angel left heaven to visit Daniel on the first of those days of special prayer, he did not, like Gabriel, almost instantly appear to the prophet. To accomplish the object of Daniel's intercession for his people and country, a moral influence had to be brought to bear on the will of the chief ruler of Persia; and so strong was the spirit of resistance encountered in him, that the aid of another, even of Michael the archangel, had to be invoked. When the reluctant will of the Persian ruler had been overcome, the archangel, "one of the chief princes," returned to his place in heaven, but Daniel's angel friend continued at the Persian court, to incline all hearts in favour of the captive Jews; and not until

events were sufficiently ripe for a communication to be made to Daniel, in answer to his prayer of many days, did the angel depart from that court and reveal his awe-inspiring form to him. Daniel listened in silence to the revelations that were made to him, and, having heard them, he silently prostrated himself before the angelic revealer. Great consideration and tenderness were again shown to him. A celestial form, not clothed with celestial splendours, but like a man, approached him, as he lay in silence, and silently touched his lips, as a sign to him to speak. What, under such circumstances and to such a being, could the frail mortal say? Daniel offered apologies for silence, by pleas of weakness and terror. He said to his instructor and comforter that he was troubled, that his strength failed him, and that he could scarcely breathe. Again there approached him, touched him, and strengthened him, "one like the appearance of a man;" and loving, reassuring words were again addressed to him. How comforting to us frail men it is to know that an angel of heaven should have said to a man, as he stood trembling and almost breathless before him, "O man greatly beloved, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong!" "When he had thus spoken to me," says Daniel, "I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me."—Dan. x., 19.

How instructive is this narrative! It shows that some at least of the angels, when not veiled in compassion to human weakness, are ineffably magnificent; that even when they unveil their glories they have forms like those of men; that they have not only visible forms but also palpable forms, with hands to be felt, and strength to lift up a prostrate and insensible human body; and that they have audible voices, and can understand and can freely speak in the languages of men. It also shows that angels *are acquainted with future events and can reveal them,*

like this angel to Daniel, as circumstantially as an historian could narrate them; that they know the names, characters, and conduct of individuals; that when a man is praying on the earth it may be known in heaven; that prayer is heard there as soon as it is offered here; that moral or material hindrances to the answers to prayer may exist which require time to be removed and overcome; and that the answers, though delayed for days and weeks, may be on the way, and in due time will come. This narrative also shows that the angels of heaven, though unseen, are present among men; that the councils of nations and of individuals are subject to the moral agency of these unseen angels of heaven; that that agency may be resisted, but that by perseverance and recruited aid it may succeed; that in influencing human minds one angel may co-operate with another; that it requires time even for such a mighty angel as appeared to Daniel, and for Michael who aided him, to overcome moral resistance; that while the moral conflict is going on no answer to prayer may appear; and that what one angel cannot do another may, for Michael did what the angel who addressed the prophet failed to do. And it shows too that among the angels of heaven there are "princes" and "chief princes," so that there are various degrees of rank and of power; that archangels have provinces of administration, for Michael was the "Prince of Israel"; and that such facts as these, in relation to earth and to heaven, may be revealed by an angel to a man.

What all the angels are may be judged from what one was; and as the grandeurs of heaven must be correspondent with those of its inhabitants, we may infer from their resplendent appearance what that world must be which they inhabit. They are the true and natural aristocracy, and their world is the real metropolis of the infinite monarchy of the Eternal One. With them we

are hereafter to live, and in their world our spirits will dwell, until the resurrection of the dead. What a transition will be our departure from this world to that! How timidly, if not tremblingly, may a holy human spirit be supposed to emerge amidst the sublime and ineffable glories of such a world, and of such exalted beings! And yet our entrance is not the object of fear but of our most cherished hope, a hope that yields "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Though frail and fainting humanity, while we are in the body, may shudder and be prostrate in the august presence of even one of these glorious beings, angels are not really objects of terror, but objects of confidence and love. In every instance in which men have been terrified by their presence they have said to them, kindly and encouragingly, "Fear not," and have thus intimated that from angels we have nothing to fear. They are eminently benignant and loving; and objects of dread are never found in objects of love.

CHAP. IX.

BIRTHS FORETOLD BY ANGELS.

HEAVENLY beings predicted four human births; those of Isaac and Samson in Old Testament times, and those of Christ and John the Baptist at the beginning of New Testament times. The foreknowledge of such events could have been from God only, for there was no natural evidence or capacity to show that they were probable or possible; and what was thus revealed on earth must have been previously known in heaven. While some revelations show that angels foreknew nations long before they existed, and many great events long before they came to pass, these predictions testify to their knowledge of even the names and characters of certain men before those men had any existence; thus their histories began in the prophecies of their births. What was thus known of them may have been known of others also; and the facts suggest the possibility of even our own existence, and some of the circumstances of our lives, being known, by revelation, to angels before we were born.

AN ANGEL AND MANOAH.—When the parents of Samson had been so long childless that they ceased to cherish the hope of family, and were disconsolate in their despair, the Lord sent an angel to them with the gratifying intelligence that they should have a son, who should be the deliverer of Israel; and he gave instructions concerning his physical and moral training. On two occasions did this angel appear. His first interview was with the wife. All his aspects were human, but “his countenance,” she said, “was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible.”—*Judges xiii, 6*. She had never seen an angel,

nor had she heard an angel described by anybody who had seen one; but the face of him whom she regarded as "a man of God" was expressive of such high sanctity and majesty, and so corresponded with her imagination of what an angel's face might be, that it appeared to be superhuman, and so filled her with awe that she did not dare to ask who he was or whence he came; indeed, in such a presence she could not presume even to speak. Manoah, her husband, believed the revelation to be of God. When a similar promise was made to several others, who were childless, each of them doubted the possibility of its fulfilment. Sarah laughed in incredulity; the Shunamite woman so doubted the promise of Elisha that she besought him not to deceive her; Zacharias, being old, was so unbelieving that he was struck dumb for a time, as a punishment; and Mary, knowing the predicted event to be naturally impossible, said, in her simplicity, "How shall this be?" But in this case, though no angel or prophet had spoken or appeared to Manoah, and though the supposed "man of God" was an entire stranger, he fully credited the communication, but prayed that the instructions in reference to the child should be repeated, that they might be better understood, and that for this purpose the supposed prophet might re-appear. In answer to his prayer to the Lord, the angel returned, and appeared before the woman in the open country, but again in the absence of her husband. She instantly recognised the countenance as the one she had seen before; and thus the personal identity of an angel would appear to be so distinct that recognition is easy and instant by any who may have previously seen him. No sooner did the woman behold him than, without waiting to hear or to utter a word, she ran to tell her husband that the "man of God" had returned, and to invite him to the interview. Manoah *hastened to meet him*, and he conversed with him about the

promised child ; but it was not until the angel was returning to heaven that his heavenly origin and character were discovered. When requested to disclose his name, the angel replied, not that he had no name, but that his name was secret or wonderful, he having a superior and indescribable nature. His earthly errand was not to make revelations of himself, but to foretell the birth of one who should deliver Israel from the Philistines. When urged to accept hospitality the holy visitor declined it, and directed that the kid which Manoah desired to prepare as a repast for him, should be sacrificed as a burnt offering to the Lord ; and he delayed his departure until, on an altar of rock, the rite had been solemnised. The angel then ascended to heaven ; and, that Manoah and his wife might know that he came from heaven, he ascended visibly before them. While they, as sinners, were offering their homage to God, in an oblation for sin, the angel, to their great astonishment, rose from the ground on which he had stood, moved in the air as though he floated therein, fixed himself over and in the flame and smoke of the sacrifice, thus showing that he himself was wholly devoted to the Lord, and then, ascending to heaven from that altar-flame, he disappeared.

This angel had no wings, nor had he any known powers or means of ascent ; yet, as though by an act of his own will, he left the earth and ascended on high. Such a being would alight on the earth as gently as human feet descend from a step—the earth not having any power to attract or to hold him to its surface ; and now, without any extrinsic aid, he ascended visibly in their presence, and in the flame ; the flame having no power over him. And yet he presented the figure and countenance of a man, though they were “terrible” in the eyes of the woman ; he had eyes which met her own, and a human voice with which he enunciated Hebrew words ; and,

not only could he speak, but he could also hear and understand the words of man. All this would seem to indicate that he possessed organs equivalent to those of the human frame. But, though thus human in all his aspects, the utter powerlessness of fire to harm him, and of gravitation to hold him to the earth's surface, was demonstrated before the woman and her husband, in the open air and in the light of day; and so awe-inspiring was the sight of the ascending angel that they fell prostrate on their faces.

The vanished form seemed to the terror-stricken man to be that of the Supreme Divinity, and to his wife he said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God;" but she, wiser than her husband, said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us he would not have received offerings at our hands, neither would he, as at this time, have showed us all these things."—Judges xiii., 23.

GABRIEL AND ZACHARIAS.—Another instance in which an angel foretold the birth of a distinguished child was that of John the Baptist. The last prophecy of the Old Testament was that of his advent and mission, and the first event of the New Testament was an angelic announcement to his father that he was about to appear. The father was a priest, and was accustomed, "in the order of his course," to burn incense before the Lord, in the holy place in the temple, while the congregation without were engaged in silent prayer. He was one day thus solemnly employed when suddenly an apparition confronted him, an angelic form standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Until that instant Zacharias was alone with God, within the sacred recess. How startling, then, must have been the appearance of another! A man could enter the holy place only from the outer court, where he would be seen, but this visitor had come *in unseen*. He entered invisibly and silently. No foot-

steps, or action of wings on the air, indicated his approach ; not the slightest sound was heard from the unusual presence, nor did any one in the crowd of worshippers in the temple behold him pass by. It was an instant and noiseless manifestation which the priest beheld, near the altar at which he ministered. He did not see him descend from heaven. The angel might have been there before he was beheld. In a moment the unseen became visible. The appearance, as in other instances, may not have been owing to any altered condition in the person of the angel, or to his having just then entered the place, but to the new power of vision given to the man to behold it. What a sight would that have been to any one who could have looked within the veil, and could have seen the radiant form from heaven in conversation with the priest ! The celestial presence was as absolutely real as the human. The sight filled the priest with consternation ; but unlike Daniel, he retained his consciousness and self-control.

If at that hour Zacharias had been able to think of aught but the august image before him, the memories of angels in history might have rushed upon his mind. Upwards of five hundred years had elapsed since the last appearance on earth of a personage from heaven. For nearly four hundred years the oracle of prophecy had been silent. During all that time no prophet arose to rebuke the ungodly, no miracle proclaimed the dominion of God. A succession of generations had passed away. Seasons and years had revolved. Ancient cities had sunk into ruins, and new and populous cities had grown up. The Assyrian, Persian, and Grecian monarchies had acquired and lost the power of empire. The dominion of Rome was then in the ascendant. Cæsar had established the strongest military power and the most extensive empire the earth had ever known ; and all nations were

at peace under the Roman sway. But while great events thus transpired on earth, no sign appeared from heaven. The sacred oracles were preserved and read as the most precious of all treasures, and the morning and evening sacrifices were daily offered in the temple. Visions and voices from heaven seemed, however, altogether to have ceased, and no phenomena but what were purely natural appeared during a succession of ages.

In the meantime there arose a sect of materialists, even among the peculiar people of the Lord, who denied the existence of angels and of spirits, and the resurrection and immortality of man. The entire people, with few exceptions, were formalists, most of them were self-righteous pharisees; and outside their little country the darkness was deep as that which precedes the dawn, for the Sun of righteousness was about to arise.

The great duty which Christ taught was faith, that men might through Him receive eternal life; for believing is receiving. But as the impenitent cannot thus believe it was needful, before Christ preached faith, that some one should come to enforce national repentance, and should thus "prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight." That was the mission of John. He was sent, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to be the herald of the Lord Jesus.

The object of the angel's visit, and of his private interview with Zacharias, was to foretell John's birth. The news was most welcome to the priest, for his home was and always had been a childless home. Before the visitor from heaven broke the silence in the holy place, which doubtless added to the awe with which the aged man gazed on the dumb and resplendent image before him, Zacharias trembled with fear; and no wonder. But the first words uttered by the angel's lips were benignant and reassuring. "Fear not!" he said. From such a being

there would be really nothing to fear, and such a presence should not dismay but comfort us. The angel knew that Zacharias had long prayed in vain for a son, and that he now despaired of an answer, and he also knew that God would answer the prayer, notwithstanding the advanced age of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Even the name of the unborn prophet was known to the angel.

The priest's amazement and terror were quickly succeeded by unbelief in the angel's words; and, indeed, there seemed to be some reason for his unbelief. The childless pair being, like Abraham and Sarah on a similar occasion, "as good as dead," the doubt and unbelief of Zacharias were founded on known natural debility. It was a natural impossibility which led him to disbelieve in the possibility of the supernatural. At any time it is easy for an incredulous heart to adduce reasons for unbelief; but the only bases of faith are in Revelation. Where the provinces of sense and reason end, the province of faith begins. Reason cannot be co-ordinate with faith, there not being any element of identity between them. Such a birth as that now foretold could occur only by supernatural power being given to natural organs; and in the presence and against the promise of a superhuman being, the gift of that power should not have been doubted. Unbelief in a promise is of all things the most insulting to a promiser, seeing that it contains an imputation of falsehood, than which nothing can be more offensive. The comforting words which fell on the ears of Zacharias, and which the angel came from heaven to speak to him, were not more incredible than was the form of glory before his eyes; yet he doubted, and he was punished for his unbelief. The tongue which uttered unbelieving words was instantly deprived of the power of speech, and that deprivation was to continue until the predicted event occurred. But no visible power was employed to strike Zacharias dumb. The angel

did not so much as touch him. A temporary paralysis of the vocal organ was threatened and inflicted, but there was no pain; the loss of speaking power was caused by the act of God, and consequently it was altogether inexplicable.

In other instances men were struck blind by angelic agencies; only in this instance was any man struck dumb. From the time of this interview until the circumcision of John, Zacharias had to employ the vague language of signs, which, possibly, was not then reduced to an intelligible system, as it now is; and even at the birth of his promised son it was only by signs that his friends could communicate with him.—Luke i., 60. It is clear therefore that he was deaf as well as dumb; and thus he received a twofold chastisement of unbelief. Not believing what he heard from the lips of an angel, he was for a time subjected to the total loss of hearing. He unbelievably required a sign, and in his own person a sign was given to him. He who would not believe the voice from heaven, should not be permitted to hear any voice. Thus two bodily organs were simultaneously acted upon by the judgment of the Almighty. The angel who inflicted that judgment predicted, at the same time, how long it should continue. To the friends of Zacharias this sudden and complete loss of the powers of hearing and speech was evidence, as indubitable as it was painful, that the vision which he endeavoured to depict to them, had really been seen by him; while the birth and peculiar character and ministry of John so completely fulfilled the angel's prediction, as to be conclusive evidence of the actual appearance of the heavenly being who uttered it.

What, then, was that angel's name? whence did he come? and how is he ordinarily employed? All this the holy angel deigned to reveal. "I am Gabriel," he said. Now Zacharias well knew that this very Gabriel had appeared

to Daniel five hundred and fifty years before. During all those years Daniel, and about a dozen generations of men after him, had died, yet Gabriel lived. Could Daniel have survived so long, what an object of age and of extreme decrepitude would he have appeared ! but Gabriel knew no infirmity. Time bent not his form, nor left its impress on his features. Neither growth nor decay was known to him. He knew no pain, no weakness, no death ; the immortals are always young. Where, during those centuries, had Gabriel been ? and how had he been employed ? An answer to this inquiry will be found in what the angel himself said to Zacharias, " I stand," said he, " continually in the Presence of God." It is true that all of us are always and everywhere in that infinite presence, and that from that presence there can be no escape ; but the words of Gabriel express the idea of place, and they imply that in some particular place the Presence of God is as it is in no other place. Thus there was a Presence of God in the pillar of cloud and of fire, which went before Israel ; there was a Presence of God amidst the awful phenomena of Sinai, at the giving of the law ; there was a Presence of God in the cloud of glory over the mercy seat ; and there was a Presence of God in the person of Christ, in whom " dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."—Col. ii., 9. These were manifestations of the Presence of God to frail man, whose body is but dust, and to whom God said, "Thou canst not see My face and live."—Ex. xxxiii., 20. But angels can behold His face and live ; for the revelation of Gabriel distinctly teaches that there is in the angel world such a Presence of God as is not known on the earth, and as would be wholly unsupportable to us, who " dwell in houses of clay." Even the sight of angels, the mere creatures of God, has sometimes so overwhelmed frail man as to cause him even to swoon, and to fall to *the earth as dead*. How, then, could we

with our eyes of flesh, and with our weak and tender nerves, behold, like them, the Presence of God? As the infinite transcends the finite, so must the fully-manifested Presence of God transcend that of the greatest and holiest of all His creatures. The dignity of God's creatures is determined, not by their relations to each other, but by their relation to Him. In this ineffable presence Gabriel stands. He waits, he attends, he serves, he humbly worships before Him. He stands to "do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word."—Ps. ciii., 20. With open ear and with attentive eye he notes the earliest expression of His will, and ministers before Him. Service is the joy of that angel's life; and what is thus said of him may be said of all other angels also. Yet Gabriel is not always in that immediate presence. He had repeatedly visited Babylon, he was now in the temple at Jerusalem, and these are but two of the instances, which may be innumerable, in which he has come forth from the Presence of God to fulfil or to reveal His will. And having visited this our little planet, to what a countless number of other planetary and solar worlds may he not have gone, in obedience to the Divine will! In coming to the earth he came not of his own will, for he was sent; and he was sent not to be a silent apparition, but to speak to the priest in the holy place, and to reveal to him glad tidings.

This conversation with the angel detained the officiating minister an unusual time within the vail; during that time the worshippers without waited and wondered in silence. What caused that strange delay? Why did he not come forth after the ordinary and usual interval of absence, during which he burned incense on the altar? The conversation of the angel and the man within the *holy place* could not be heard without. How little did the public congregation imagine what was transpiring on

the inner side of the vail on which they gazed ! How little did they think that the very angel, of whom they were accustomed to read in the book of Daniel, was personally present at that moment in the temple, was only a few yards distant from them, was visible to the officiating priest, and was in the act of making important revelations to him ! This fact, like others, shows that such beings may often be near to us when we think not. Zacharias at length came forth, but he could not speak. His duty, upon coming forth from the holy place, was to bless the people in the name of the Lord ; but, though his hands might have been uplifted in benediction, he was silent. Had he been able to speak, what a description he might have given of his interview with the very being from heaven who, in the days of the captivity, had appeared to Daniel ! But though he was dumb, Zacharias laboured to show them, in the language of mutes, that he had seen a heavenly vision ; and, extraordinary as such an event was, he succeeded in making them understand it. What strange news, then, would each one who attended public worship in the temple on that afternoon take to his home ; of an angelic vision, and of the priest being struck dumb ! Zacharias might afterwards have doubted the memory of that vision, and his unbelieving heart might have resolved it into an imagination, but his being dumb, as a punishment for unbelief, was a confirmation of his faith ; and the birth of the promised son at the appointed time, together with the restoration of the power of speech and of hearing, at the time foretold, would ever be to him indubitable proofs of the reality of his vision in the temple.

GABRIEL AND THE MOTHER OF JESUS.—About three months before the birth of John, the angel Gabriel, who had appeared to Zacharias, returned to the earth, and was seen and heard once more. But on this occasion he

appeared, not to an aged priest, but to a young woman; he entered not the holy place of the temple, but appeared in a lowly cottage, very rudely built and scantily furnished, such as were inhabited by the peasants of Nazareth. The maiden was alone in the little tenement when he appeared. Never before had an angel come from heaven to be the bearer of a message so fraught with infinite consequences to all nations as this. While he stood in the Presence of God, and worshipped among "multitudes whom no man could number," he well knew that one of the greatest events in the annals of eternity was about to take place, in the birth of the Saviour of men, and that he would be honoured with Divine authority to reveal it. He knew who was chosen to be the honoured mother of the Christ of God; he knew her name, the very house in which she lived, the favour with which she was regarded by God, the unequalled honour she should have among women, the supernatural cause by which she, a virgin, should become a mother, the name of her child, His Divine nature, the great salvation He should procure and bestow, His kingly power, and the perpetuity of His kingdom; these things were all known to Gabriel when he was in heaven, and were all distinctly though briefly revealed by him to Mary during their interview. The one object of his mission was to make the revelations. The poverty and meanness of the village, and of the house in which she lived, and her poverty and lowly rank among men, would be accounted by him as things of nought; for the event he came to announce rendered her the most illustrious of the daughters of men; this the angel both understood and declared. For obvious reasons it was necessary that Mary should clearly understand the origin and object of the extraordinary birth. The necessary information might, indeed, have been communicated by *an inspired prophet*, but the occasion being unexampled

and incapable of repetition, and the revelation to be made being one of the highest moral grandeur, and of infinite consequence to the whole human race, it was most befitting that an angelic messenger from heaven should be sent to impart it.

How startling, to a timid young maiden, must have been the vision of that very angel whose presence so overcame Daniel, premier though he was of a great monarchy, that he fainted and fell at his feet! The angel paid no homage to her, however, nor did he give to her any of the many blasphemous designations which, in modern times, millions of infatuated men have applied to her. He did not call her "Queen of Heaven," nor did he in any way represent her as being a saviour of men, or an intercessor on their behalf. Her only importance to the human race was in her being the mother of the humanity of our Lord, and little or nothing more of her than this is placed on record. She herself was a sinner saved by grace, and in the gospel she altogether disappears before the majesty of the Divine Son, having no office, power, or influence, in relation to heaven or to men. Gabriel addressed her simply by her true name, "Maria." But the sight of a being who had been and ever will be seen among the resplendent forms before the Throne, and the sound of a voice which had been and still is heard among the praises of heaven, though she knew him not, moved her spirit, notwithstanding that the words he addressed to her were the most gratifying that could fall upon a woman's ears. He had come unannounced. Nothing had indicated his approach. Suddenly and silently this prince from the palace-world of the Eternal was revealed before her, and so soon as she saw him she also heard him speak to her. What a contrast was this, between so great an angel and a timid young woman! As the two were alone, she was not sustained by any human sympathy

or human presence; yet not even Abraham appears ever to have conversed with an angel more intelligently than she did. The disciples of Jesus uttered screams of terror when, one night, being on a lake, they supposed their Lord, who was walking towards them on the water, to be a spirit. But Mary, though alone, though filled with wonder at the sight of an angel of God, and though deeply touched by his words, was surprisingly tranquil in spirit. There were, indeed, emotions of trembling within her. The fact that the angel bade her not to be afraid, shows that she beheld him with some fear; and yet she seems to have answered him like a confiding child. What superhuman love would beam forth upon her in that angel's face! How benignant and gentle was his voice! and how reassuring were all his words! But Mary gazed in silence on the glorious form that stood before her, and in silence she heard him exclaim, in her native tongue, "Hail! highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."—Luke i, 28. What could such language mean? To her it was for the moment a profound enigma; and, until the mysterious words were explained, she rapidly revolved them in her heart, and vainly strove to understand them. Her conduct on this extraordinary occasion evinced, for one of her sex and age, very great superiority of character. Almost any other woman or any man would, in such a presence, have swooned, or have fled in terror, or have uttered loud cries of fear; for even the stoutest hearts have been appalled by unearthly apparitions. She, indeed, was deeply affected, and the angel's first announcement, before it was explained, filled her with perplexity and wonder, yet she retained so much presence of mind, and such self-control, as to be able to reason in her own heart, and to converse intelligently with her celestial visitor.

Mary's emotions were depicted on her countenance;

for the face of a pure and simple-hearted one is always a true mirror of the soul; and this angel would know, from his former experiences of human weakness, that the majesty of his presence could not fail to fill this young human heart with wonder and dread. But all his words were those of tender sympathy and loving-kindness, and, before she could speak a word, he encouraged her, as he had others, not to be afraid of him. In truth there is nothing for any one, who loves and confides in God, to fear from an angel of heaven. If we beheld the person of an angel we should not see an image of stern, imperious severity; but the expression of heavenly love, ineffably sweet and holy, would appear on his countenance. Could we hear angels' voices they would fall on our ears in sweetest cadences. And even the grasp of an angel's hand, were it felt, would be intended, as in the instances of Lot, Elijah, and Daniel, to render to us some service of love. Indeed, only visits of love are made by the angels of the Lord to His servants on earth.

The promise which Gabriel was sent to deliver to Mary was not only extraordinary, it was supernatural; yet she doubted not his words. She asked not who the messenger was, or whence or with what authority he had come. The splendours of his own person were a sufficient demonstration of his character and of the world to which he belonged. His credentials were all in himself. She therefore listened to him as to one who came from and represented God, and she received his message in her heart. But very naturally she, in her transparent simplicity, desired to know how, in the absence of a father, it could be possible that she should become a mother. This deep problem being solved in the language of metaphor, she, without one thought of selfish fear, devoutly and gratefully acquiesced in the will of the Lord.

The errand on which Gabriel had been sent having been

fulfilled, he returned to the Presence of God, from which he came. His message had been fully delivered to one who, though lowly in social rank, was the most distinguished of womankind, and there was no reason why he should any longer stay on the earth. This is the fourth visit recorded of Gabriel. Since then he has not, so far as we know, re-appeared on the earth. Angels certainly rendered services to Christ, but as their names were not divulged, it cannot be known whether or not Gabriel was one of the favoured few.

CHAP. X.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS SCENE.

THE first Christmas Day was the most memorable of all birth-days. On that day, even while it was yet dark, was seen the grandest of all angelic manifestations. In number the angels were a multitude, a heavenly host; their personal splendours were brilliant as heaven; and they were heard singing praises to God. The scene was in the open country, just outside the little rural town of Bethlehem. The celestial ones appeared not to the literati of Judea, nor to any of those pretentious religionists the Pharisees, nor to any inmates of palaces, but only to humble pastors, the night-guardians of sheep, who, while keeping their flocks together in the fields, expected no other visitors than sheep-stealers or wolves. Such men would know very little of the great hope of the human race, in the promise of Christ, or of the ancient Bible records of angelic appearances on the earth. Very early on this Christmas morning, even before the dawn, while these shepherds were tending their sheep, a celestial apparition suddenly startled them; the vision of a living form, not on the earth, nor in the clouds, but in the air, immediately near, burst upon them and filled them all with consternation. The scene was dazzling. Their own forms had been very obscurely visible to each other in the darkness; but this form was a luminous body, floating as it were in the atmosphere, and surrounded with an element of burning splendour, "the glory of the Lord." Not only did the men see a magnificent vision from heaven, but, in the stillness of the early morning, they also heard articulated words, in which

was made a distinct revelation of the most beneficent and astonishing event that ever happened since the world began, in the birth of the most august of human beings, though a peasant's son. The revelation from heaven announced that the birth-place was a cattle-shed, outside an hotel, at Bethlehem; that the bed was a manger, and that the dress consisted of the coarse woollen cloths known as swaddling clothes. All these details may have been made known to him by revelation, or, what is equally probable—from the deep interest he felt in the extraordinary birth—he himself on that morning, and before appearing to the shepherds, may have visited the humble shed, and have seen the precious Infant whose birth was fraught with such infinite consequences to the human race; though no one there beheld him, or imagined that such a one as he was present among the lowly throng.

The promiscuous little crowd of pilgrims at the inn would regard the birth as a very ordinary event. The young mother was a poor woman on travel, with her affianced husband, and they intended to sojourn there only for a time. The advent of the Babe, so far from being welcomed by the landlord and landlady of the little inn, or by its inmates, would be regarded by them as an inconvenient and troublesome event. And yet it was declared by the majestic and mysterious stranger from heaven to be an occasion of great joy, not merely to the footsore traveller who rejoiced that a man child was born, but to every nation on earth; for in the person of that Child was on that day born a Saviour which was Christ the Lord.

The appearance of the angel filled the hearts of the simple rustics with terror; but his words, like those of other angels to other terror-stricken men, were re-assuring *and gentle*, for he bade them not to be afraid of him,

seeing that he was the bearer of "good tidings of great joy which should be to all people." Thus was the most auspicious announcement made that ever came from heaven itself.

No sooner was the great advent proclaimed by the voice of one heavenly messenger, than a great host of similar voices burst forth in song, praising God; for a multitude of choristers, a grand choir from before the eternal throne, had descended to the night-sky of the earth. Thus they came forth from heaven, for a time, to be near to the scene which was at once the most humble and the most august that ever appeared, and expressed their congratulations and their praises in a song, the echoes of which will never die. Those echoes, reaching through all ages, have been heard by us, and they will reach onwards until the great shout of the descending hosts from heaven, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, shall herald the dissolution of all things earthly, the redemption of the dead, and the beginning of a new and endless era of life and glory.

In some of our great oratorios the words of holy Scripture are sung by several thousands of human voices, in the sublimest music that could be composed by human genius; but, as angels are superior to men, their music far transcends in sweetness, richness, and majesty, the music of man. Though the voices were those of a multitude, they were not like the confused and discordant sounds of a promiscuous crowd, but were rather like the musically attuned volume of praise in a great congregation of worshippers, the same words being uttered in harmonious notes and cadences. There was complete identity in the sentiments, and perfect euphony in the music. A wonderful solo was first heard, and then a still more wonderful chorus. The recitative was a revelation of the grandest embodiment of *infinite* love, and the chorus was such a

sublime and simultaneous outburst of praise as had never before reverberated in earthly skies, and as could not be equalled, unless it were in the angel world. The inhabitants of two distant worlds were in close proximity, the earthly being silent and astonished listeners to the heavenly; for they were speechless with amazement and fear. The heavenly visitors beheld the trembling keepers of sheep; one of their number distinctly addressed them, and the choral host sang praises which could be both heard and understood, that thus the song might be transmitted to all generations in all countries; and the humble pastors distinctly saw the great host of singers. There is no language or dialect known to civilization into which the angels' words have not been translated. They are as imperishable as they are precious. Countless millions of human voices, from that day to this, have rehearsed them; and year after year, as one generation succeeds another, they will continue to be sung, reverberating through all countries and through all time, until the present era of the old earth's history shall be wound up by another advent of the same Incarnate One, in less humble state. As the dawn of Christmas Day—the greatest anniversary observed by the human race—appears in the eastern horizon of all the continents and islands of this world, men of all tongues take up and repeat the “good tidings of great joy;” and, in all the temples devoted to Christ, from the little one-storied shanty, in the backwoods, to the most magnificent pile of architecture ever built by human hands, is sung, in at least a hundred and fifty vernaculars, the angels' doxology, unequalled alike in its sublimity and in its brevity—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men.”

Let us ponder over the incidents of this strange choral performance. There was a new and unearthly band of *vocal musicians* praising God, who could sing like us and

in words like ours. There was harmony in their song. Not a single voice in "the multitude of the heavenly host" was dissonant, for the singing would be like that constantly heard in heaven, where the science and art of music must be more perfectly understood than in this world; the capacities of its inhabitants being so much greater than ours. But, though angels are vocalists, they never utter moanings of pain, exclamations of fear, threatenings of vulgar anger, or elegies or wailings over the dead. Their melodies are the spontaneous warblings of gratitude and joy, of adoring loyalty and love; for their musical proclivities and powers are Divine intuitions. With what speechless wonder did the simple-hearted and untutored shepherds listen to the startling concert from above! and with what silent and rapt attention and awe did they gaze on the resplendent hosts! When the vision had vanished, their eyes, still full of the glory of the vanished scene, were fixed on the dark heavens in which they then saw only the faint dawn, and in which the silent stars were twinkling forth their broken telegraphic rays, in the dim and distant perspective; and, amidst their flocks, with the angels' melody still ringing in their enraptured ears, the shepherds continued to listen, that they might catch the faintest heavenly sound from the ascending hosts, whose full chorus had broken the stillness of that early morning. Such an anthem mortals never heard before and may never hear again. Would that we had a notebook of the music, as well as the words of their song! for, in that case, even George Frederick Handel's sublime conceptions in his "Messiah" might be transcended, and human choristers might reproduce not only the sentiments but the very cadences heard from the angel-world, and possibly heard in that world itself.

Here, then, were an angel choir and a human audience. What great disparities were there between the "many

mansions" whence those choristers came, and the rude stone cottages in which their auditors, and all peasants at that time, usually ate their frugal meals and slept! and what a contrast there was between the celestial singers and the human listeners, in the constituent elements of their nature, in their intellectual and emotional powers, in their knowledge, and in the scenes, society, modes of life, and objects of pursuit with which they severally were familiar! The angels were the "morning stars" of heaven, shining for ever and ever; the shepherds were the glow-worms of earth that perish.

Only once before had angel melodies resounded under earthly skies, and on that occasion, as on this, there was singing. "All the sons of God" came down to look upon this newly-created world, which was crowded with the beauties and bounties of the beneficent Creator. With what admiration did they gaze upon the landscape scenery of the earth, its green verdure and its gorgeous skies, seeing a form of beauty in every form of vegetable life, and every flower pencilled by the Divine Artist in all the prismatic colours of light, with exquisite taste and infinite skill! By this act they showed how able they are to appreciate the beauties of material worlds, and that nothing is an object of indifference to them in which there is a development of the character of God, or which relates to any of His creatures. "The morning stars" then sang, they "sang together," in concert, "and all the sons of God shouted for joy."—Job xxxviii., 7. But the earth at that time was unpeopled, so that no earthly creature listened to their praises, as when they announced the birth of Jesus.

The moral significance of the scene at Bethlehem infinitely transcended the phenomena; for the Divine Saviour, the hope of all generations and the promise of God, had now come. He, indeed, was a peasant's child, *with a stable* for his birth-place and a manger for His

bed. Yet, though no heralds of the State were despatched to royal courts to trumpet forth His birth, and though in truth the world did not know Him, its Redeemer and King, compared with the birth of Christ, the birth of an heir to an imperial throne was insignificant as the birth of a pauper. From that time a new chronology and a new era in the history of mankind began. The sceptre of the universe belonged to the tiny hand in the manger, and the life now begun, in a rude hut, was to culminate in an act of solemn and public self-oblation, to make the pardon of sin, in the government of God, as consistent as is the punishment of sin with immutable law. A new and purely spiritual sovereignty, the sovereignty of the conscience, the affections, and the will, was now to begin, a mediatorial monarchy, which comprehends all others, as the waters cover the sea.—Is. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14. At the feet of this Divine Humanity, the kings of nations and the higher kings of the realms of science reverently worship. The divine prophecies of all ages centred in Him. His lessons of spiritual morality, taught in the simplest forms of speech, and His new spirit of sublimest charity and piety, are permeating and transforming all human society. “On His head are many crowns;” and to His reign there will be no end.

But to the Lord Jesus and to His heralds all worldly wealth, ranks, and domains, were as so many nothings; for in His eyes, and in theirs, our social castes are artificial and unreal, our gold is dross, all worldly pomps are puerile vanities; and were the angels, like their Master, to be enshrined in forms of flesh, they, like Him, would despise mere wealth as mere earth. He, to whom it would have been humbling to descend to Cæsar’s throne, deigned to appear in lowliest life; and, because He so appeared, a great throng of holy ones left their heavenly palaces, crossed *realms of space* through which nothing

but angels and star-rays were wont to pass, visited the scene of His birth, and, while all the people were asleep, sang the first Christmas carol. This was the first of all Christmas stories; it is still the most enchanting of all, and in its simplicity, as in its divine grandeur, it is unequalled and inimitable; for no Christmas story is so magnificent and so deeply touching, to angelic and human sympathies, as is this.

The humble scene in that rude Syrian shed witnessed the inauguration of God's infinite and merciful love to our race; and from that scene sprang forth all the triumphs of goodness over evil, and of knowledge over ignorance, all the true blessedness of human hearts and homes, all the beautiful charities and graces that adorn human character, and all the joys and glories of men in the eternal heavens. From that spot, and from that hour, a divine spirit came forth, which, though resisted and sometimes vanquished, amidst the endless varieties of rampant evil with which it holds unceasing conflict, lives and reigns and is indestructible. Notwithstanding all the mutations of time, that spirit strengthens and grows; its gentleness overcomes all savage and headstrong oppositions; and, silently, calmly, and powerfully, like the unseen and all-conquering forces of Nature, it achieves the highest and most enduring dominion.

But what unearthly halo was that which then illuminated the hills and dales near the little country town in Judæa? There is nothing like it among all the burning and brilliant elements known to us. The whole scene around the flocks and their keepers was lit up with celestial splendour. The halo first proceeded from the one form of burning glory in the midst of it, and afterwards from "a multitude of the heavenly host," a whole *army* of minstrels, all of whom were visible and resplendent in the heavens. No light of science, or of nature,

ever resembled this. The lights in our night skies are the same as solar light; and, though differing in tint from each other, they are identical in nature. This light was unique. It was "the glory of the Lord" that "shone round about," a supernatural and Divine splendour, as though the Infinite One Himself were the sun from whom it shone forth. This "glory of the Lord" was kindred to that which appeared like electric fire on the heights of Sinai, when no soft euphonies were heard, but when voices of thunder and articulated words of awe from the Eternal pealed over the plain, and among adjacent hills, while the tribes listened with closed eyes and in silent terror, and the great limestone mountain quivered before the manifested glory. This light resembled that pillar of glory which, like a moving tower of splendour, went before the pilgrim hosts through the depths of the Red Sea, and across the desert, to Canaan. The light was of God and from heaven. But it did not come like a brilliant meteor, expanding in breadth and brightening in splendour, as it approached. It burst forth suddenly, as "in the twinkling of an eye," and when it vanished, there was the wonted stillness and darkness of a rural district before the dawn.

When the living form from heaven first became visible, and the shepherds first found themselves and the flocks and scenery around them enveloped in an element of supernatural glory, they, not knowing what the vision portended, were seized with terror, even before there was time for thought; for we often feel before we can think. All pale and trembling, each rustic spectator sat or lay still on the grass, gazing in mortal fear on the unknown and formidable presence; and the holy and loving angel well knew how their timid hearts throbbed with vague apprehensions; while in the light which his presence cast upon them, *might be seen* their blanched faces and

trembling forms. No spirit of love would willingly be regarded with dread, or could look upon the sufferings of ignorant fear without compassion. The first words that fell on their ears were words of comfort, and, while the angel bade them not to fear, he, like a sound logician, gave to them the best of reasons why, viz., his good tidings of great and universal joy in the birth of the Saviour; and the singing host confirmed the announcement, in their anthem of "Peace on earth, good will to men."

"Good will to men" there always was and always will be in the divine evangel; but where or when, since that auspicious day, has there been "peace on earth?" The true church of Christ, which consists of the true Christians in all religious organisations, and of none but true Christians in any, is the realm of peace; for we become true Christians only by the kindness of love becoming the very law—the all-permeating element of our moral nature. "The water of life" is not "hot water." The lamb does not bite or even bark, like the wolf. The zealots of forms, of dominions, and of mere creeds have been incessantly addicted to strifes; so that church history, which tells chiefly of their contentions, is pervaded less by the spirit of peace than of war. The indestructible spirit of gentleness was in the character and mission of Him who was now the august Infant of Bethlehem. That spirit has survived all the mortal strifes of many melancholy centuries, and now gives promise of attaining universal sway. Beasts of every savage instinct have warred against the Lamb, in the very name of the Lamb; but long suffering, elastic and unconquerable gentleness overcomes headstrong forces, disarms them, makes captives of them all, and wins *ascendency* and empire. No waters can drown it, no *fire* can consume it, no sword can slay it. It survives all

enmities, and all martyrdoms, and notwithstanding all defeats, it conquers. Nothing but goodness is imperishable. The very perfection and power which instruments of destruction have attained, become, in the hands of Him who reigns for ever, the very occasion of their total disuse. Of all trades the infernal and insensate trade of war will be the first to perish. The far-reaching prophecy of "peace on earth" is in process of fulfilment. Serenity is slowly, silently, and assuredly stealing over our stormy world, just as, amidst the dark and wild clouds of a stormy morning, the sun silently and majestically ascends on high, pouring forth his ocean of glories on the earth. All the sweet and holy influences which soften and humble the rugged wills of men, and calm the tumultuous surgings of human passion, all the marvels of inventive art, and all the growths of human science, had their origin in that precious Babe, which became the human temple of the Supreme Divinity, which was born in a Bethlehem stable, and whose birth was heralded by the song of angels. To that Babe, even then, the eastern magi, guided by a moving starry body, offered gold and incense; and, since then, all the wisest, holiest, and gentlest of human kind, have consecrated to Him their property, their genius, their very lives, and such a wealth of holy and seraphic love as never was, never could have been, and never can be given to another. His is a new spirit on the earth, born from heaven; and that pure and gentle spirit purges human hearts of discordant passion, and imbues and expands them with sweetest charities, smoothes the asperities of human manners, melts all enslaving fetters, assuages all anguish, establishes the golden law of equity and the golden grace of kindness, shields all consciences from coercion, extinguishes the spirit of military aggression, and unites all the families of the earth in the sympathies of a common brotherhood.

The shepherds were favoured with a glimpse of heaven. They were eye and ear witnesses of the supernal glory. They, like us, had often gazed upon the dead and into the open graves; but now they saw heaven opened; celestial forms of life appeared, the very glory of heaven became visible to mortals, and they heard its enravishing melodies. When the heavenly pioneer was first seen and heard, all the "multitude of the heavenly host" were invisible and silent, as though they had been distant; but, after the shepherds had been somewhat prepared for the fuller revelations of many angels by the preliminary appearance of one, and after they had been reassured by loving words, and by the "good tidings" of the Divine Infant's birth, the whole host became suddenly and simultaneously visible, and burst forth in a loud song of praise.

All these angels were conscious of each other's presence. They were not strangers to each other, as they were to the shepherds, but were a great host of loving friends. Indeed, all the inhabitants of their world are friends. All the heavenly host came together, on the same errand, as bearers of the same message, all participated, by deep sympathy, in one great benevolent joy; and, when their memorable mission had been fulfilled, they all returned together, as they came. They must have left heaven after the event which they came to reveal had occurred; and yet the appearance immediately succeeded it. How rapidly, then, must they have crossed the immeasurable interval between their world and ours! They came with equal velocity, not one being too early or too late to join in the anthem of praise; and, singling out this planet from among the countless millions of floating worlds, they came direct to the very spot; though at the time it *was* on the night side of the earth.

The angels were audible as well as visible. Though

they audibly commune with each other, we can no more hear them than we can see them, however near they may be to us. Their voices may, however, be either audible or inaudible to mortals. The shepherds heard them as distinctly as they heard one another, and the voices which were heard on earth at that early hour, are still heard even at this hour in the heavens. From angels' lips the shepherds heard the language and dialect of their country and of their childhood. The "tongues of angels" may include all tongues, for angels are linguists. The gift of tongues was a miracle in men, but a common endowment of angels; not imparted by teachers, not acquired by labour, but intuitive, an inspiration of God.

There was order and logical succession in the conduct of the angels. No rejoicing was heard until the occasion of joy was made known. The revealer showed himself before he delivered his message, and he delivered his message before the symphonies of song were evoked from the attendant hosts. The shepherds and the angels were equally silent while the announcement was being made; but when the best news that ever greeted human ears had been told, innumerable hosts, like forms of life and light, came forth from concealment, around the speaking angel, and became visible like him, each one's voice was loud and distinct as his, and there was perfect harmony in their action, their sentiments, and their song.

The greatest of all intelligent beings thus manifested themselves to the humblest of all. Humble men are still favoured more frequently than men of rank with spiritual manifestations of God, and are more frequently honoured than they as messengers of the good tidings of great joy. The very presence of the holy ones brought "marvellous light," even heavenly light, into this dark world. The light was the visible symbol of the still more glorious

light in which God, and Christ, and heaven are revealed, and which illuminates the darkened souls of men, and the dark abodes of the dead, with the hope of immortality. The fearful were encouraged not to fear at all. The holiest and most loving of all creatures cannot be objects of terror to any who really know them; and it is only because we do not know them that we are afraid of them. Our fear is the offspring of ignorance and of sin. But our Father in the heavens has encouraged us not to fear the evil; still less, then, should we fear the good. As we are not to dread the angels of God, why should we dread to enter the world of angels? Faith in Christ is the sovereign antidote to all fear; for we fear nothing while we fully confide in Him. Only doubt trembles. All our strong natural instincts constrain us to cling to the world in which we were born, and which we know so well, and to contemplate the prospect of our departure with dread; and yet, many of the most weak, uneducated, and fearful among us, when armed with strong faith, have "joy unspeakable and full of glory," in prospect of their departure from the body to the "innumerable company of angels." It was in comforting and chiding love, and because there was nothing to fear, that the intelligent and sympathising angel said to ignorant and trembling men, as was said by other angels also, and as the Lord Himself repeatedly said, to the fearful in spirit, "Fear not."

All the shepherds saw and heard the angels. Had only one seen the vision, all the others might have doubted his testimony, and he himself might have doubted the evidence of his own senses; but the witnesses were several, each and all heard the same words, and beheld the same scene; and the revelation was immediately and circumstantially verified by facts, in the manger, the *stable*, the *inn*, the birth, the time of the birth, the

Infant Boy, and the peculiar dress. Illusion was impossible and imposition must have been equally without object and without motive. The sublimest of all beings was there, in the humblest of human forms. In the deepest lowliness of humanity was seen the highest magnificence of heaven. All was visible in the light of that most memorable of all days; and all was found to be precisely as it had been revealed to the night guardians of sheep, by a deputation from heaven, the representative and messenger of God.

The first Christmas scene is unexampled. Never, on any other occasion, have so many angels appeared so near to a number of men; and never before had such a rehearsal of the praises of heaven been heard, nor will it ever be again, until the Lord shall return from heaven, and "all His holy angels with Him." Daniel saw myriads of angels before the throne of God, but they were distant; and Elisha and his servant saw heavenly hosts in military array, but they were on an adjacent hill; and both Daniel and Elisha beheld only a silent scene. The celestial panorama was visible to those two prophets, but no verbal revelation was made, nor was there heard any song of praise. In this vision the evidence of the ears fully confirmed and agreed with that of the eyes. There was no possibility of any optical illusion; and the genuineness of the revelation was fully attested by all the details of the scene at the Bethlehem inn; which scene was the first of that series of supernatural manifestations which culminated in the ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven.

CHAP. XI.

MINISTERING ANGELS.

THE necessities of hunger and thirst have, in several instances, been relieved by ministering angels. We ourselves have very little sympathy with sufferings which never came home to us; and, probably, we should feel still less were we to witness any of which our nature is not susceptible. The bodies of angels are not constantly and slowly dissolving, like ours, for they are imperishable; and, consequently, angels never experience, as we do, any cravings for food and drink, to supply the loss of wasted substance. It might be supposed, therefore, that beings like them, whose bodies are spiritual, and whose natural rank is far higher than our own, would not find congenial objects of attention and sympathy in animal bodies like ours, especially as our moral nature is evil; yet several facts in Holy Scripture show that it is otherwise, and that in the instances of Hagar, Elijah, and Christ practical expressions of sympathy with physical suffering were evoked.

A domestic feud in the family of Abraham constrained him to send away Hagar and her son Ishmael. This was a grievous act to him, but it was done with the Divine sanction. His object was to restore peace to his house, but the intention of God was to separate two nations, the descendants of the patriarch's two sons, who should become the two most peculiar and indestructible nations of the earth. Hagar having gone forth with her child into the wilderness of Beersheba, on her journey towards *Egypt*, her native country, the small supply of water she carried in a bottle was soon spent, so that the solitary

wanderers over hot and arid wastes began to endure the dreadful cravings of unsatisfied thirst, a thirst that superinduces exhaustion, fever, delirium, and death. A spring of water was close by, indeed, but it was unknown to Hagar, and, not to witness, in helpless anguish, the death of her child, she placed him in the shadow of a shrub, and sitting at a distance, she wept piteously, in distress and despair. Their cries were unheard by any that were of this world, but they were regarded in heaven, and God beheld the mother and her child with compassionate love.

It was intended by the Almighty that this child should become the father of the Arabs, whose national existence and peculiarities have been in all ages, as they probably will be in many future ages, public evidence of the truth of the Divine revelation respecting the child, which was made before he was born. When that revelation was made Hagar had fled from a tyrannical mistress, and "the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur."—Gen. xvi., 7. She was informed by the angel, on that occasion, that her unborn son would "be a wild man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him," and that he should "dwell in the presence of his brethren." That prophecy has been verified by the history of his descendants from the beginning until now. Their homeless, wild, wandering, and predatory modes of life, and their hostile relations to all other peoples have continued unchanged for upwards of three thousand years. The character and habits of every other nation have been subject to change, those of the Ishmaelites or Arabs have been almost immutable; and, having always held undisputed possession of their own country, they have always dwelt in the presence of their brethren. As individuals and as families they have never ceased to be wanderers, yet as a people they never left their own country. All

their peculiar habits and characteristics bear witness to the truth of the angel's prophecy, spoken nineteen centuries before Christ, to a fugitive bondwoman, sitting by a well, in the wilderness of Shur.

Hagar's bodily and mental anguish, at the time when she and her child suffered from the want of water, may have caused her to be forgetful of the angel's prophecy. She had no hope, at that critical hour, in any human help or sympathy, for no human being was nigh; but the unseen angel of the Lord was present with her in that desolate place. He, indeed, saw her, but she could not see him. He walked not on the earth, like man, for he was in the air above. Though no form appeared to her, she heard the voice of one who was invisible, which called her by her name, inquired what ailed her, as though he would listen to a recital of her distress, encouraged her, in the mortal perils that beset her and her child, not to be afraid; assured her that God heard the voice of the lad where he was; directed her to lift him up, and promised that, so far from dying, he should become the founder of a great nation. Her weeping had prevented her seeing a well that was close by; but, by assuaging her tears, God opened her eyes to see it, so that then they had an abundant supply of water.—Gen. xxi, 19.

From this brief narrative we learn that an angel of the Lord knew that a lone woman and her little son were in danger of dying of thirst in a wilderness; that the angel was acquainted with the existence of a natural spring of water, in that uninhabited region; that, though he himself knew not the sensations of hunger or of thirst, he had sympathy with thirsting humanity; that, though unseen by the sufferers, he could so speak as to be heard by them; that he understood the vernacular tongue of the country and of the time; and that, by his revelation, *at the command of God*, human thirst was assuaged,

human life was preserved, and a prophecy, which the history of all subsequent ages fulfilled, was delivered to a mother, to the effect that her little boy, whom she supposed to be dying of thirst, should become the father of a nation which exists in Arabia to this day, distinct, as the Jews, from all other nations.

Nearly a thousand years later, an angel supplied bread and water to a great prophet, when, in the same wilderness, he was hungry, athirst, and ready to die. The event followed one of the most memorable of all demonstrations of the existence of God. At the instance of Elijah, all Israel was called upon by their king to meet him on Mount Carmel, that the great question of idolatry might be publicly determined. On that mountain, in the open day, and in the open air, a solemn and formal appeal was made to the national idol, the god of fire, to answer by fire, as a demonstration of his being; and there was no response. The prophet of Jehovah then made a solemn and public appeal to Him, when, instantly, and from a cloudless sky, fire fell on the altar that had been built expressly for those appeals, consumed the sacrifice that was laid thereon, and caused a trench full of water around it rapidly to dissipate in steam. The crowds of spectators at once fell on their faces, in homage and in awe, and exclaimed—"The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."—1 Kings xviii., 39. But because the people, at the command of the prophet, slew the idolatrous priests who had seduced them into treason against the Lord, the idolatrous queen, a woman of an imperious will, vowed to be revenged upon him on the morrow; and, to save his life, Elijah fled. Having hastily travelled a hundred miles, over a country without roads, he was completely overcome by fatigue, and, lying on the ground at the foot of a tree, he asked of God that he might die, and fell asleep. There lay asleep, on the bare

ground and in the open air, that human form which, ten years later, was taken up into heaven without dying. No food nor any friends were nigh. But the presence and condition of that lone man in the wilderness were known in heaven, and in heaven he was an object of sympathy. Angels are not at any time wearied or faint, their forms not being subject, like ours, to the laws of waste and supply; nor are they exhausted by travel, not even by a flight from their world to ours; and yet they have compassionate consideration for the purely physical sensations which human bodies feel, after great toil and long abstinence from food; and an angel came to minister to the exhausted man of God, as he lay in a state of unconsciousness on the earth.

How little did the sleeping prophet imagine that an angel from heaven had come forth to minister to his necessities, and was employed in providing him with bread and water, the best and yet most common food and drink! Only the voice of an angel was heard in the last instance, comforting a distressed woman, and directing her to a well; in this instance, not only was the voice of an angel heard, but a visible and palpable form was presented. The slumberer was gently awakened by the angel. He felt the touch of the angel's hand, and was by him brought back to consciousness. Upon opening his eyes he beheld the superhuman form, benignantly bending over and looking on him; and, so soon as he could listen, he heard the heavenly one say, "Arise and eat." What a surprising vision for a waking man to behold! While he had been asleep that angel had done the offices of a servant, and a simple repast now awaited him. There was a cup filled with water, from a well, and there was a cake that had been baked on fire. What humble work, for an august angel, was this preparation for the cravings of a man! But even the Lord of glory Himself had

compassion on the hungry, and by a miracle He fed them. In that case a miracle was necessary, for a mere handful of food was all that was at hand to feed a great multitude. No miracle was wrought in this instance; nor indeed were miracles ever wrought when ordinary means sufficed. Who among us could eat and drink in the presence and from the ministrations of an angel? Yet, while his heavenly benefactor was standing by, Elijah calmly and thankfully ate and drank, and thus recruited his wasted strength. He was not overcome by such a presence, as we might be, for he was familiar with objects and powers which this world cannot know. Having enjoyed the unexpected meal, prepared by an angel's hands, and being still wearied and heavy, from his exhausting journey, Elijah again sank into sleep. But the guardian angel still stood patiently by; when the prophet had slept away his weariness, the angel, seeing that he was refreshed and strengthened, touched him again, and by that touch awoke him once more, and invited him to regale himself with water and bread. After enjoying this simple repast Elijah lived without food forty days and nights, and he travelled to Horeb, where he held an interview with God, and audibly conversed with Him.

A third and still more memorable instance is recorded, in Matt. iv., 11, in which food was provided in the wilderness, for the Lord Jesus, after He had fasted forty days and nights. Not only did He not eat one morsel of food during all those days, but He had not the shelter of any tent, nor repose on any bed. Arid sands and naked rocks surrounded Him, yet He fainted not, neither did He hunger. During that supernatural fast an unearthly being approached Him, whose object was, in the first instance, to ascertain if Jesus were the predicted conqueror, of whom God said, four thousand years before, that He should bruise *the serpent's head*. To eyes of flesh the stranger

was invisible, and to human hands he was impalpable. No man but the God-Man ever beheld a fallen angel, for fallen angels are enchained in everlasting darkness. They are not permitted to become visible to us. But Jesus was conscious of the evil and superhuman presence. He discerned the being that drew nigh, and they two were able to commune with each other, like men; Christ had descended from the highest heaven, Satan had ascended from the lowest hell; and now, on the platform of the earth, as a medium world, one of the most memorable of all recorded interviews is held.

At the end of forty days' fast Jesus felt the sensation of hunger, but He had nothing to eat. Satan thereupon suggested that He should transubstantiate a stone into a loaf. And why should He not? Christ afterwards turned water into wine, though wine is a mere luxury, whereas bread is a necessary of life; He was also equally able to turn stone into bread, and no law would have been broken had He done so. But He would not work a miracle to demonstrate His divinity to the enemy, whose moral power in man He came to vanquish, nor even to satisfy the cravings of hunger in Himself. At a subsequent period He so augmented the quantity of a mere handful of food as to satisfy thousands of men and women, after they had fasted three days, and as to leave, in fragments, twelve times the original quantity; yet for Himself He would not create a morsel of bread, but would become, to His disciples, an example of patience and of trust.

This temptation was succeeded by two others. In one, Satan suggested, by a mutilated quotation of Scripture, that the Lord should cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, to show that angels would bear Him up; and by thus falsely quoting Scripture he not only *tampered* with the integrity of its text, but gave a *material* application to a purely spiritual promise.

The third temptation was by far the most artful of the three. Having presented to Jesus, in a moment of time, a panorama of all the kingdoms of the world, Satan said to Him, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it." If Thou therefore wilt worship me all shall be Thine."—Luke iv., 6-7. This was as though he had said, If Thy object be to rescue the world from me by conquest, how much better would it be for me to surrender it up to Thee, on conditions, by treaty! Thou hast not a single follower on the earth. Thou art altogether unknown as a king, and art scarcely known as a man. Thy conquest of the world would cost Thee thy life, and would entail unceasing strife between Thy followers and mine for thousands of years. But here, and now, on this mountain top, where we two are alone, Thou mayest at once gain all, by paying one solitary act of homage, the homage of a moment, to me. Only once fall down at my feet! and what then? Why, then, no agony will bathe Thee in a sweat of blood; Thou shalt not be despised or rejected of men; Thou shalt not be arrayed in the mock symbols of derided majesty; no guilty crowd shall clamour for Thy blood; no monarch or his minions shall set Thee at nought; no crown of thorns shall lacerate Thy head; Thou shalt avoid the horrors of a death from torture, and, instead of there being long ages of mortal strife, and an endless roll of martyrdoms, Thou shalt from this hour obtain all the kingdoms of the earth, with all their glories, and shalt reign for ever; for I will instantly surrender up all my power, and retire from the earth. But Christ came to save the world, not by falling down at Satan's feet, but, as God had said, by bruising Satan's head. What audacity was in the very idea, Satan's foot on the Saviour's head! Had it been possible *for the Incarnate One to have been thus ensnared, infinite*

goodness would have paid homage to evil, the great propitiation, which was to make the forgiveness of sins consistent with the authority of the law that condemned it, would not have been offered; Satan's chain would have been fastened around the hearts of men more firmly than before, the world would have been given up to despair, and the Son of God would have become a vassal to Satan's throne. At this suggestion, the bare possibility of which almost transcends belief, Jesus said, "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

While all these scenes transpired, Jesus continued to hunger and to fast. But the two most wonderful of all beings, who held this interview in the lonely desert, were not alone. No man indeed was near; and had a human spectator been at hand, he would have seen Jesus only, and would have heard Him speak words to one whom he could not see, and have seen Him listening to words which he could not hear; for Jesus communed with one who "had not flesh and bones," as He Himself had. No interruption was offered while temptations were presented and repelled; and yet it would appear, from the fact of angels having ministered to Him immediately after Satan's departure, that they, though unseen, were near, equally with that mighty angel, the tempter. Though they have not such material bodies as ours, they were the bearers of material sustenance, such as was suitable for the appetite of that human body which was the temple of God. They were near to Jesus and to Satan, awaiting the termination of their interview; but they would not obtrude the offer of their ministrations until Satan had been bidden to depart, and Jesus was alone. Satan might have been visible to them, for they can see *and hear* beings who, though morally dissimilar, have a *nature kindred to their own*. If they were cognizant

of Satan's presence he would be equally cognizant of theirs. Yet he addressed no communication to them, nor did they to him. There was no communion between them. Before he fell, they all may have been fellow-worshippers, fellow-students, and fellow-servants in heaven. But Satan coveted a higher position than his own, and by that very act he committed treason against the Infinite and Eternal One. He left his own habitation (Jude 6), and fell, and his fall was beheld as being that of lightning from heaven.—Luke x., 18. There was now, therefore, a great gulf fixed between them, so that there was no communion between their light and his darkness, their holiness and his evil. They witnessed the scenes of the temptation, as though standing apart and in silence. Jesus needed not counsel or aid from them, in His conflict with Satan. They were His servants; and, had he so desired it, twelve legions, or upwards of seventy-two thousand angels would instantly have descended to serve and obey Him; but until Satan was expelled from His presence their duty was to wait; and they waited accordingly. The time of waiting must have been considerable; if they were present from the time when Jesus hungered. He first hungered, after His long fast, when Satan advised him Him to turn stone into bread. After that, Jesus proceeded to Jerusalem, to the temple, Satan being with Him; and, from thence, He proceeded to the high mountain, whence all the kingdoms of the world were shown to Him. During all these temptations Jesus hungered, yet did not eat; but the angels waited until the conflicts were over, and not until Satan's expulsion from His presence did they offer Him food.

What kind of food did they offer to Him? whence did they obtain it? and what kind of hands were those that were the bearers of food suitable for a man to eat? They, when they *came from heaven*, knew the very spot where

Jesus was. No guides directed them to Him; and, though personally strangers to appetite and sustenance, like ours, when they came they well knew what food was needful for the Lord, and where to obtain it. How reverently would they minister to Him, in whom, as they well knew, dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily!" This, however, was not the first time that God had provided food for the hungry in the wilderness. He may have done what, at the instance of Satan, Jesus would not do, viz, provide bread by His almighty power. Or, if no miracle were wrought, the food, wherever it might be, belonged to Him, for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

These several facts show that among the inhabitants of heaven there is loving sympathy in the necessities and sufferings of the inhabitants of the earth; that angels know when men suffer from hunger and thirst,—and we consequently infer that sufferings more painful than those of hunger and thirst are known to them; and that it is not felt to be beneath the dignity of those high and holy ones to come forth to minister to the bodily wants of men.

CHAP. XII.

ANGELS IN THE SEPULCHRE OF CHRIST.

WHAT a spectacle was that of angels in a human grave, the grave of Christ! So great is the contrast presented in the glories of an angel and the horrors of a grave, that a grave would be the last of all earthly places in which one would expect angels to appear. And yet, devout women saw angels, robed in white and shining garments, seated on a ledge of rock in the sepulchre of the Lord; and the sight was equally significant and memorable.

The death of Christ was, to all His disciples, an unexpected and embarrassing event. They were so unable to understand its relation to His earthly sovereignty, in which they were to be the chief ministers, that it baffled all their cherished hopes, and perplexed and distressed them. The darkest hours they ever knew were those which intervened between the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord. For how could that cold corpse which lay in Joseph's sepulchre have been the temple of the Son of God? and how could He be expected to establish a universal kingdom, who had been publicly executed and was now buried? Many inhabitants of Jerusalem regarded Jesus, while he was in the sepulchre, as a remarkable peasant malefactor, who had been condemned for treason against Cæsar, and blasphemy against God, who had been derided as a sham king, and whose cross was at that time as infamous as the gallows is now; so that they could not see any connection between the closing scenes of such a life as His, and the establishment of the wonderful monarchy of the Messiah, depicted in inspired prophecy. The high priest of Judæa, the lord

chief justice, and the king, with all the sacerdotal and judicial bench, had unanimously, and with the general concurrence of public opinion, dishonoured and condemned Jesus; and Jews and Gentiles had united to put Him to death. When His body was laid in the grave, many supposed that He would never reappear, and that there was an end to his pretended kingdom and an end to Him; and yet there were strange misgivings in the public mind, as to what had just been done, and what might still happen. The door-way of the sepulchre was filled with a great stone, a seal was affixed, that the least disturbance of the stone might be detected, and relays of soldiers were stationed as guards, until the time of Christ's predicted resurrection should be past.

How, then, was all this regarded by the angels of God in heaven? The events of the morning of the resurrection show that they, whose mere appearance caused brave hearts to quail, and strong men, even men of war, to faint, took the deepest interest in the "despised and rejected of men." They witnessed the agony of Christ, before the tragic scene came on, which bathed Him in a sweat of blood, and which then, as the cause of His death, made His life to be a sacrifice for sin; and one of them appeared to Him and strengthened Him.—Luke xxii., 43. They saw the rude funeral procession from the cross to the cave of burial. They knew all the futile and childish precautions adopted to defeat the predictions of His resurrection; and they also knew the very moment when He would rise from the dead. Angels left their thrones of glory that they might minister to Him when He arose; and, after all that deluded and wicked men had done to kill Him, and to crush His cause for ever, they, by their very presence, filled the guards with mortal terror, and they brake the seal, rolled back the stone, did honour and homage to Him whom the world derided and

hated ; and, entering the rudely excavated cavern, from which He had risen, they made it their temporary abode.

Though the Roman soldiers watched at the Lord's sepulchre with a view, if possible, to frustrate His prophecy, that He would rise from the dead, the pretext given out to the public was that they sought to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples. The watch continued from evening twilight until near the dawn. The orders of the military force were to repel all intruders ; no one was to be allowed to approach the sepulchre during that night. But the possibility that any angels of God might appear on the scene, to do honour to "Jesus, the Crucified," never entered into the calculations of His enemies ; for God was not in all their thoughts.

The disciples, being timid, disconcerted, and struck with terror, came not to the sepulchre until the soldiers were gone ; but two strangers from a distant world alighted on the spot, and became visible. Who then were they ? whence did they come ? and what was their errand ? They came not as men on an evil errand might come, stealthily, in disguise, hoping that their presence might not be detected, and in fear of detection. The listening guards heard no soft footfalls in the night stillness, while all the city slept ; nor did they see any moving forms in the moonlight, or in the light of their night lamps, now nearly spent. And yet two figures were revealed, which came not from the east, west, north or south, but descended from heaven ; though their descent was not witnessed. The vision was as though portions of transparent air had instantly assumed palpable forms of life ; or as though images of supernal splendour, brilliant as lightning, had instantaneously appeared, in the darkness, to confront them. In height, breadth, and form, the figures resembled those of men ; but their *costume* consisted of robes of light, their faces

were dazzling as two suns, and their eyes were piercing as though they could read the very thoughts of every heart. Who could have expected such visitors as these at a dead man's tomb? How could a band of fighting men, with shields, swords, lances, and arrows encounter them? Did any sentry, as they drew nigh, utter the usual challenge—"Who goes there?" Did the guards fall into line, present arms, and offer resistance to their approach? Angels are not to be repelled with carnal weapons. The Roman guards, as heathens, knew nothing of the heavenly world, or of holy ones from heaven. The two glorious forms filled them with wildest terror, so that every man's nerves were unstrung; and, paralysed with fear, the whole band fell to the ground, as though they had been slain in battle. When, after the first shock of consternation, their consciousness and strength returned, and they were able to return to the city, to speak once more to men of like passions with themselves, the recollection of the celestial apparitions was to them like a terrible dream of supernatural objects; and, yet, coerced by authority and bribed with "large money," they had the wickedness to propagate a known and obvious falsehood, so as to account for the disappearance of the body of Jesus from the tomb, which they had been commanded to guard until the break of day.

The soldiers, probably, were deluded and malignant like the rulers; but their presence at the sepulchre had no influence on the events of that memorable morning. The formidable keepers were not approachable by any of the Eleven; but the angels would not even speak to them, they ignored their presence, and treated them as so many nothings; while the men of war almost died of terror, at the sight of the ministers from heaven.

The moment had now come when He who was dead *should rise to live for ever*. The pierced and ruptured

heart resumed its action, vital forces returned to the cold, prostrate, dead body in the cave; and the Supreme Divinity reinhabited the human temple. Jesus became the absolute conqueror of death, and He, in His own person, presented a visible and perpetual demonstration and monument of His own power and of His will to raise His true disciples from the dead. "Because I live," He said, "ye shall live also."—John xiv., 19.

The rolling away of the stone from the door of the sepulchre, by an angel, was a formal, official, and very significant act. That angel acted as a minister of Divine justice. Jesus yielded up his life as an atonement for sin, that the world might be saved, not by a lawless mercy, but by mercy consistently with law. "The Crucified" did not die from crucifixion, that being the mere incident of His death, but from a ruptured heart, occasioned by a renewal of the agony which, a few hours before, had bathed Him in a bloody sweat, and which arose from the burden of our sins being laid upon His soul. The symbol of that agony appeared in the fire on every altar. As the fire consumed the burnt offering, the agony consumed the life of Jesus. By His death He offered ample satisfaction to the claims and principles of outraged government and violated law; and, having "paid the uttermost farthing" of the great debt for which He became our Surety, the door of the prison-house of death was opened before Him, as One against whom there could not be any further claim; and thus, as concurrent representatives of vindicated law and of satisfied justice, angels, by a formal act, released our Surety and set Him free.

The soldiers did not witness the resurrection of the Lord, for, when He rose and came forth, they lay as so many dead men on the ground, unconscious of the fact that, *at that moment and on that spot*, the most glorious of

all events in the annals of mankind was taking place. When, by His own power, He returned to life, no eyes of earth or of heaven saw Him spring to His feet within the dark cavern, and the only eyes that saw Him emerge from the sepulchre, as Saviour and Sovereign of all, were those of the angels who had rolled away the stone, and who now, at this hour, behold Him, "the Lamb that was slain," before the Throne, where He lives and reigns, as crowned High Priest, the Lord of all life and of all glory.

The empty sepulchre of Jesus was a type of the great fact that the graves of all that die in Him shall, at His word, become empty like His own. When He came out the two angels went in. Their entry was a triumphal act. They could not take the place which He left vacant in the manger or on the cross, nor can they ever sit on His glorious throne, but they entered into His grave because He had left it; and, for a time, they silently sat, one where the sacred head and the other where the not less sacred feet had lain. How honoured was that spot! and how unique was that sight—immortal and glorious angels seated within the vault, and on the place on which the dead body of Christ, the sacrificial victim of the world's altar, had been laid!

An angel's "Meditations among the Tombs," and especially in the tomb of Jesus, would, if written, form a volume which every man, were it from no higher motive than curiosity, would like to read; for it would show sin, suffering and death, as they are viewed by the sinless and deathless, from the standpoint of heaven. What were the thoughts and emotions of those two holy immortals as they that morning sat in a human sepulchre? Did they then think of the countless millions of the dead who had been and would be laid in graves? Did they *think* of the heart-rending anguish with which the living

place the remains of their departed ones out of their sight ? Did they think of the complete decomposition of all human bodies in the dark and dismal "house appointed for all living ?" Did they think of the divinely-predicted hour when, at the command of the risen Saviour, who has "all power in earth and in heaven," all that are in their graves, whatever kind of graves they be, shall come forth, and when death shall be done away ? Did they think of the infinite love of Him who stooped down to death, even to death in its most painful and humiliating form ; and who, by His own temporary abode in a tomb, gave halo, honour, and hope even to a realm in which, but for Him, no brightness or hope could have appeared ? And did they think of the Lord's marvellous transition of places, from the sepulchre to the supreme throne of the universe, when He rose from the dead to ascend on high, to be above all, and to reign over death, and hell, and heaven for ever ? The grandest scene human eyes ever saw, next to visions of the Lord Himself, and of the opened heavens, was that which a few pious and faithful disciples were permitted to see in the sepulchre of the Lord, when they beheld two angels occupying the place left vacant by Him who had been dead, and immediately after He had left it, filling it with the splendours of their presence. The immortals of heaven sat in a charnel-house of earth, as though they would there, in that place of man's humiliation, contemplate the overthrow of the empire of death, and the gift of eternal life to countless millions, whose bodies, having died and perished, should be raised by the King of Glory, to live for ever.

While these great and holy beings were in the sepulchre they showed their love of neatness and order, when they wrapped up the linen clothes, left by the risen Saviour, and laid them in a place by themselves.

The spectators of the scene, of angels in the sepulchre.

were the holy women who ministered to the Lord in His lifetime, who long lingered about His cross, who attended at His burial, and who had now—recounting to each other, on the way, the wonderful memories of the previous three years—brought spices, to embalm His body. They correctly calculated upon the departure of the guards before their arrival at the sepulchre, but were apprehensive of a mechanical obstacle to their access to the entombed body of the Lord. The entrance to the sepulchre was like that of any ordinary cave, and it was closed, not by a door, like that of a house, but by a stone. The stone “was very great,” not being a slab, but a large unhewn fragment of rock, which human hands could not lift, so that it had to be rolled away; and it was so large that their combined strength was not sufficient to roll it. Who, then, they asked one another, could roll away the stone? and not any of the little band could answer the question. How little did those simple-hearted disciples imagine, when, in the depth of their grief, the prediction of the Lord’s resurrection was forgotten, that the great stone was already rolled away by hands from heaven!

The rolling away of the stone was clearly not a miraculous act; for an angel’s force, equal to adequate muscular or mechanical force, was employed. An angel lifted the fainting body of Daniel, and upheld him as he stood trembling; and an angel lifted Peter also, in a prison, to awake him. “The nature of angels” is superior to all earthly natures, and is essentially different from them; and their celestial powers are able to control the terrestrial, without being subject to any reaction. The inertness of the huge piece of rock was overcome by one of those heavenly beings “that excel in strength” (Ps. ciii., 20); the strength of two not being required for the task; so that the strength of an angel must be greater than that of a man.

As that angel alighted on the earth, "there was a great earthquake." Enormous subterranean forces were at that instant in violent action, and the ground quaked. Not only were the earthquake and the angel's descent coincident events, but, the use of the word "for" indicates that those events had the relation of cause and effect. "There was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."—Matt. xxvii., 2.

That was an unexampled sight. An angel who had left his place in heaven, sat on the rough rock of earth, with which it had been attempted to imprison the body of the Lord, and which he had rolled away. In the sepulchre also the two angels sat. They sat not as we daily sit, and as we nightly sleep, to obtain relief from weariness. When we stand we are able, for a short time, to resist the powerful loadstone attraction of the earth; but our muscular power is quickly spent, and, succumbing to the all-conquering force, we seek, by rest, to relieve our wearied frames and to recruit our wasted strength. But material and natural forces are inoperative on celestial beings; for angels ascend and descend at will, and they never know fatigue; as they sleep not, neither are they ever weary. Theirs are "spiritual bodies." Though a few favoured men have seen and touched them, and have heard their voices, yet we mortals know not, nor in this life can we know, the constituent elements or the organic structure of such bodies as theirs, or the laws by which they are governed. One angel sat in triumph on the great stone which was used to prevent the resurrection of the Lord; and both sat in triumph in the sepulchre, as a place that had been the scene of the greatest humiliation and most glorious victory of the Son of God. While thus seated they could not but contemplate the *wonderful facts* of the death and resurrection

of our Saviour, the sublime truths with which those facts are identified, and the magnificent and eternal consequences of His great work, in the suffering and conquest of death.

The angel whom the two Marys beheld in the sepulchre appeared like a young man. Did that angel ever look younger than he then did? or does he now appear any older than he appeared then? Such ideas are incredible, for each implies that angels are subject to change, and that consequently they will sometime decay and die. Angels were created, not born. They never knew infancy, nor can they know decrepitude. They have immortal vigour and immortal youth. That angel who resembled a young man will never resemble an old man, nor did he ever resemble a child. In his face the women beheld all the appearances of youth; and, when those women rise from the dead, and are able to see him once more, with glorified human eyes, they will discover no lines of age furrowed on his countenance, no burden of centuries or of milleniums on his shoulders, no locks of snowy whiteness on his head. Nearly sixty human generations have lived and died since that memorable day, when the angel appeared as a young man in the sepulchre of Jesus; but, were we permitted to behold that angel, he would now appear to us as young as he appeared to the Marys in the sepulchre; and when he shall attend the Lord at His coming, to judge the world, he will not appear a day older than he did when human eyes first saw him. Even at that time he might have been older than this old earth or than the sun; and he may have shone in the eternal heavens, and have ministered before the throne of God, longer than any star has shone in the infinite regions of darkness. Even the rocks of this world, in the course of *time*, become disintegrated by atmospheric action, but *immortal* angels are always young and never old. *Eternity* can never age them.

The women, when they saw the celestial apparitions, were weeping, and they gazed through their tears in silent terror. Though "affrighted," and though "they trembled and were amazed," they uttered no scream, no exclamations of fear; but, in silent and trembling homage to the angelic majesties, they bowed down their faces to the earth. The silence was first broken by the angels, who, by speaking at that moment of profound and thrilling interest, showed that their forms were not illusions in the women's eyes, but were the forms of living and intelligent beings.

One of the angels, seeing the tears and hearing the sobs of Mary Magdalene, who had the first interview with them, tenderly, and perhaps reprovably, inquired, "Woman, why weepest thou?" The questioner himself had never wept. He had no dead or dying kindred to bewail; for there is nowhere an angel's grave over which an angel might weep. Tears, diseases, deaths, funerals, sepulchres, and garments of mourning were altogether unknown to his race, and to his native world. He did not like to see a weeping woman; and there was loving sympathy in the inquiry, "Why weepest thou?" That inquiry was meant to be consolatory, and to imply that there really was not any reason why she should weep about the Lord. But the glorious fact which the angel knew was, at that moment, unknown to her. All that she knew was—what to her were the most melancholy and inexplicable of all facts—that Jesus was dead, and that He was so lost, to all that loved Him, that not even His corpse could be found. In all she knew of Him there was cause enough for her to weep; and even for the earth itself, spring-time though it was, and for the brightening heavens of that early morning, to be in mourning; and, in her ignorance of the Lord's resurrection, there was no reason for joy, nor any mitigation of her great grief.

The representatives of two very dissimilar worlds appeared, at that moment, in the persons of that inquiring angel and that weeping woman. She was a sinful and mortal, a devout and reverent disciple of the Lord, and was sorrowfully searching for His dead body, that she might complete the funeral rites—having no thought of the resurrection; but the angel was holy, blessed, and immortal, he had come on a mission of triumph, and news was on his lips which has thrilled, and always will thrill, the hearts of all generations. Poor weeper! all that she then hoped for was that she might have some slight melancholy comfort in the discovery of the missing dead; but the angel had to tell her that the dead whom she sought was alive for evermore; for at that hour the risen One had won the greatest triumph in the annals of eternity, and had Himself become the living and imperishable pledge that all His redeemed ones should come forth from the grave, at His word, and live for ever.

When the angel asked Mary Magdalene why she wept, she instantly answered him; for her grief was greater than her fear. The reason why she wept, she thought, was plain enough; men had taken away the Lord, and she knew not where they had laid Him. While speaking these words, she heard footsteps behind her, and, turning to look, she saw the risen Saviour, yet, half blinded by her tears, she knew Him not, and His first words to her were a repetition of the words of the angel, "Woman, why weepest thou?" and, He added, "Whom seekest thou?" Thus she was kept in momentary suspense and ignorance, by angels within the sepulchre and by the Lord without; and then came forth that revelation, to her ears and to her eyes, which for eighteen centuries has moved the universal heart of humanity, which still *moves the spirit of the whole world, and which will fill all eternity with wonder and joy.*

As several women, who, like Mary, were searching for the body of Jesus, stood disconsolately in the large cavern, wondering that it should be empty of its dead, two angels suddenly appeared amongst them, who said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." At that moment and in those words eternal sunshine beamed forth through the deep darkness of despairing grief. The women then wiped away their tears, never again to weep over the glorified dead. The glories of angels, of heaven, and of the resurrection, then filled that tomb; and infinite joys sprang up in the hearts of those women. They, as they wept and as they rejoiced, in the sepulchre and in the presence of the angels, were representatives of thousands of millions of women, of men, and of children, who have wept and will weep at the grave, in most bitter anguish, and yet, while weeping, have joy in a most precious hope. Each bereaved parent, each orphan child, and each widowed wife and husband, as they stand weeping by the grave, is asked by the voices of the angels and the voice of Jesus, "Why weepest thou?" Will not thy dead live again? Hast thou no hope for thy dead, that he is even now alive? Is there no heaven? Will there not be a resurrection? Is there no Redeemer from the grave? Thy lost one, though for a short time lost to thee, is not lost. Thy dead still lives. Thy departed is not perished like the brute; is not in perpetual exile, like a fallen angel; is not a chained captive in the prison-house, with the devil and his angels, tormented with their flame; but is a blessed emigrant from this world of nights and winters, of pollutions and miseries, and of deaths and graveyards, to a golden strand, and to the glories of perpetual summer and of everlasting sunshine. No one in this world so truly lives as they live whom men call the dead. "*Woman, why weepest thou, then?*" Dost thou

weep because the lost is found? because the dead is alive? because heaven has received its own inheritor? because the liberated and glorified one has escaped from a dying body and a dying world, to regions of eternal day? Woman, why lookest thou downwards into that dismal grave, rather than upwards, into heaven? Why gazest thou on deepest darkness, in which thou art like the blind, and not into peerless light in which thou mayest see? Why is thy sorrowing heart among the dead, and not with the living? among the silent and insensible tenants of the tomb, and not with the sanctified ones, in their robes of glory, before the throne? The same angel voice which Mary heard still speaks to us from the silent and repulsive grave, asking each one of us in tender remonstrance, as we weep there, "Why weepest thou?"

"Woman, weep not," said the Lord to a widow of Nain, whom He met on the highway, in a sad funeral procession, and who was bitterly weeping over the dead body of her only son. He was at that moment about to recall that woman's son to life; and He will as certainly raise our dead as He raised hers, and raise us as He raised him. He Himself, indeed, wept over the dead; for great love finds in death all the elements of great grief; and yet in Christ there is so sure a hope and so great a joy, there is such fulness of joy in the presence of God, and at His right hand such pleasures for evermore, and the resurrection of the dead is made so absolutely certain, by the most distinct and repeated revelations of God, that the words of the Lord, "Weep not," may now be addressed to every weeping mourner, whose dead died in the Lord. "Have faith in God," said the Lord Jesus. Our grief for the dead is in our ignorance and unbelief; *our hope and joy are in our faith.* The women at the *sepulchre* knew only the reasons for weeping; the angels

knew all the reasons for rejoicing. Very differently does one and the same event appear, viewed in the darkness of earth and in the light of heaven. The canopy of thunder-cloud, which is dark and threatening, as looked at from the earth, is a sea of glory as viewed in sunshine from above; and such is the difference in the views of those who dwell on the two sides of that dread veil which we must die to pass.

The heavenly visitors saw the blanched faces and prostrate forms of the timid and trembling women, when, looking in the sepulchre, for the dead body of Jesus, only their own glorious forms were visible to them in the darkness, and they said, "Fear ye not. Why seek ye here the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." That place is now not known; and it is well that it is not, for superstition would find an idol even in a place. It was the void in that place, not the place itself, to which the attention of the women was called. The divinely illustrious occupant of the place had left it, never to return; and, before seeing Him, the angels invited them to see, from His absence, that He was risen. They descended from heaven to see, and, for a brief time, to occupy, that vacant place, to roll away the stone, by their appearance to disarm the guards, to be a demonstration of the true character of the Crucified, to instruct and comfort His distressed disciples, and to do honour to Him on this the most august occasion of His earthly life.

The angels showed, during their brief interviews with the women, that they were well acquainted with all that the Lord had said to them, in reference to His death and resurrection; for they recalled to their recollection the words in which He foretold that He should be delivered into the hands of sinful men, that He should be crucified, and *that on the third day He should rise again*; reminding

them of the place where all this was said; and they informed them that He would again meet His disciples in Galilee. Their command to the women, to go and tell the news of the resurrection to "the disciples and Peter," showed, not that Peter was primate, for in that case his name would have been first, but that they knew that of all the eleven he had most deeply sinned, and was the most distressed; and they desired as speedily as possible to assuage his grief; so that, though the messengers were to tell all the disciples, they were above all to tell him. Thus the holy ones from heaven showed how well they knew all the events connected with the death of Christ; and with what consideration and tenderness they regarded him who had fallen most deeply into sin, and had most bitterly bewailed his fall. In gently chiding the women for regarding them, the holiest and most loving of all creatures, with terror, they showed compassion for human weakness, and sympathy in suffering from groundless fear. Nothing is said of their arrival or of their departure; only their appearance, their conduct, and their words are described; but all that is related of their personal splendours, of their dress, of their revelations, and of the effect which a sight of them had on the women and on the soldiers, shows the great superiority of angels to men.

CHAP. XIII.

A ROMAN OFFICER AND AN ANGEL.

AFTER the time of Balaam, and until the time of Christ, no visitor from heaven appeared to the men of any nation other than that of Israel; but, about four years after the Lord's ascension, an angel visited a Gentile officer of the Roman army, in his own house. The occasion was one of infinite moment to him and to his family, and also to the whole human race.

At that time the revelations of the Gospel were scarcely known beyond Judæa. The apostles, though directed to "preach the gospel to every creature," did not comprehend the extent of their mission, so that the area of their labours was very limited, and any proposition to enlarge that area was strongly discountenanced, as unpatriotic; for the prejudices of the apostles led them so to interpret the Saviour's command, as not to have any idea that He intended them to evangelise any people besides their own.

When the Lord committed the emblematic keys of His kingdom of grace to Peter, He conferred upon him the honour of being the first, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, to open that kingdom, by preaching the gospel, first to the Jews and afterwards to the Gentiles. Accordingly, Peter was the apostle who, while his colleagues stood by, opened the kingdom of Christ, at Jerusalem, to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, and invited them to come in; but that kingdom continued for several years to be closed to the Gentiles, so that they still "sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death;" nor did *even Peter understand that the work of first opening*

it to them, had, from the first, been devolved upon him. As he, like the Romanists in our own time, had no true idea what the Divine Master meant when He entrusted him with the commission, symbolized by keys, to unlock the mysteries of His truth and love, a special interposition of Providence, by visions from heaven, was necessary to explain it, so far as it related to the Gentile nations; for Peter's mind, and the minds of all the apostles, had to be freed from the strong and narrow prejudices of education and of race. Two visions from heaven, correspondent in meaning and coincident in time, were vouchsafed, one to Peter, and the other to Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band. Cornelius had a vision of an angel, who directed him to send for Peter, to tell him the words of salvation; and shortly afterwards Peter, in an afternoon sleep, had a vision, or trance, in which he was told that creatures which God had cleansed were not to be called common or unclean, though he had always regarded it as a religious duty so to call them; and thus was revealed to him the will of the Lord that he should overcome the unchristian prejudices of his country, and, by responding to the invitation sent to him, at the instance of an angel of the Lord, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Cornelius was a kind and deeply pious man, and all his family were like-minded with him. The depth of his piety was apparent in his frequent and fervent prayers, and his benevolence in his liberal alms to the poor. But he knew not Christ, nor did he know much, if aught, of heaven. He probably did not presume to hope that either his devotions or his charities were known by creatures higher than men,—the inhabitants of a world infinitely transcending this world. But one afternoon, about three o'clock, one who is called "an angel of God," and "a holy angel" (Acts x., 3 and 22), entered his house and at once addressed him by name, "Cornelius." When

the pious man of war looked on the celestial form in bright clothing, he was greatly afraid. The voice was like that of a man, and the outline and aspect of the stranger's form were human. There was not "a multitude of the heavenly host," as at the birth of Jesus, to overwhelm him with terror; for there appeared but one. The being who visited him was holy and gentle; and his voice, his countenance, and his manners were reassuring and attractive as those of a most loving and supernal friend. He did not introduce himself by revealing his name, or by stating whence or from whom he came. Of himself he said nothing. His own person was a visible demonstration of his authority to say what he said. Cornelius saw, at a glance, that his visitor was not of this world. The very appearance of that angel was to him a revelation of the existence of beings who are worshippers and messengers of God; of heaven, as the world to which those beings belong; and of their character, and the heavenly majesty of their persons. The wonderful visitor who stood before Cornelius, and conversed with him, was the very image of benignity and love; and yet he presented a superhuman dignity that would fill any human heart with awe. He was the true type of all the holy angels of heaven; he represented "the King of Glory;" and in him there was nothing to fear; and yet, at the sudden appearance of such a presence, the boldest and most intrepid of men would be timid and would tremble.

Cornelius was not struck dumb by the heavenly apparition; but his instant, abrupt, and perhaps involuntary question, "What is it, Lord?" which was equivalent to saying, "What is the matter, sir?" betrayed bewilderment and fear. The angel's answer was immediately given, and it was very reassuring and comforting. "Thy prayers and thine alms," he said, "are come up for a memorial before God," *Thus this angel was acquainted with his*

supplications and with his acts of benevolence to the poor; a fact which shows that men's characters and dispositions, and their conduct in relation to each other and to God, are known in heaven. The inhabitants of heaven knew that Cornelius, though devout and though charitable to the poor, was not saved.—Acts xi, 14. They knew that his salvation was possible, that there were words of salvation for him to hear, and that by hearing them he might be saved. What those words were they also knew; and, consequently, they must have been acquainted with the facts and doctrines of the Gospel. They knew that Cornelius and all his family were in a fit state of mind to receive those words. They were acquainted with the fact that Peter was the one apostle whom the Lord, while yet on the earth, and before He died and rose again, had charged with the mission of opening His kingdom to the Gentiles; as, pursuant to the same authority, he had already opened it to the Jews. They knew that Peter, not fully comprehending the extent of his mission, would not go to preach to the Gentiles unless he should be invited, nor unless his duty should be made clear to him. They knew that Peter was at Joppa; and they also knew the very house in which he lodged, that it was situate by the seaside; and, indeed, the name of his host, Simon, and even the trade of that host, tanning, were known to angels in heaven; and these facts were revealed by this angel to the military officer, who, until that moment, had never even heard of Peter. The object of the angel's departure from heaven, and of his visit to earth, was to state these facts to Cornelius. He knew the house of Cornelius as well as he knew that of Simon the tanner; and to that house he proceeded direct from the "Father's house." The names, residences, and worldly employments of other men may be as well known to angels as were *those of the tanner and of the soldier*. Probably there is

not anything known to any man but what is also known to those holy beings whom we have not seen, but who, during the time of Divine Revelation, occasionally appeared to men.

If we ask why the angel himself did not tell Cornelius those wonderful words, now so familiar to our ears, by which he and all his house should be saved, the answer is obvious and brief. His mission was not to preach, but to give to him the name and address of the preacher, that the work of evangelising the Gentiles might be begun. That and only that was the work he came to do, and having done it he at once returned to heaven. God saves man by man. But what an authentication of the truth of Peter's words of salvation was this apparition and this revelation from heaven! Cornelius had not to study the evidences of Christianity, the genuineness of miracles, and the credibility and circumstantial fulfilment of prophecy, before he believed the words which Peter had to tell. Before he heard them he was assured of their divinity, by a princely messenger from the highest and holiest of all worlds; and when he heard them it was not as men hear ordinary news, or the historical records of previous generations, or the revelations of science, with mere credence, or with curiosity and wonder; a supernatural and divine power attended the utterance of the words; a power which gave peace to the consciences and renewed and sanctified the moral nature of the officer, and his family, and of "many that were come together," and which filled them with the love of God, and with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." "The Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word." Thus they had the witness of the Spirit of God in themselves. This was a Divine attestation of "the truth as it is in Jesus." In all this we also are "partakers of their faith" and "helpers of their joy;" but, as that was the age when miraculous

powers were conferred on many who believed, they were also enabled to speak in other languages, correctly and at once, by inspiration, and without instruction or study; and in all those languages they praised and magnified God. After so gracious an interview with an inhabitant of heaven, after hearing the message of Divine love from the apostle of Christ, and after experiencing the power of God, and receiving the gift of tongues, that most marvellous of all gifts, how near to heaven would the spirit of Cornelius feel! and, when the hour of his departure was near, how greatly would he delight in the prospect of entering within the veil, to live amidst the glories of the world whence that angel came, and again to have loving communion with him!

CHAP. XIV.

AN ANGEL OF DELIVERANCE.

THE eventful night of Peter's deliverance from prison presented three very different scenes, one in Peter's cell, one in Mary's house, and one in Herod's palace.

Herod persecuted the Christians that he might please the Jews. He had already murdered James, an apostle of the Lord ; and, being applauded for the wicked act, he seized upon Peter, as an equally distinguished victim, in the hope that, by publicly immolating him, public applause would gratify his vanity still more. He wore gorgeous apparel and was daily regaled with sumptuous repasts. The knees of adulation paid homage to him ; and on the very night of Peter's incarceration he retired to his chamber, with obsequious attendants, to sleep on his bed of down.

But Peter was in a dungeon ; and in those days dungeons were little dens of dirt and darkness. As he had bearded the judges of the land, in open court, and boldly charged them with complicity in the guilt of crucifying the Lord of life and glory, they desired to destroy him. He was chained in a dismal cell to two soldiers, while two others were stationed as sentinels outside the door. Thus degraded he lay sleeping on the floor, and on the following day he was to be executed, as one who was not fit to live.

At this crisis the little church in Jerusalem was in great alarm. Its members had no influence in any judicial court ; for the grandees delighted in shedding Christian blood. To appeal to the tyrant would have been to appeal to *him against himself* ; and, from want of time,

an appeal to Caesar was impossible. There was not a court or a throne in the world to which they could look for protection or help. But they could go where persecutors could not come. Though powerless on earth, they, as petitioners, were all-powerful in heaven. They made no attempt to rescue Peter by stratagem or by force of arms, nor did they enter a caveat before the Council, but, betaking themselves to prayer, they made their appeal to the unseen Court of Heaven. Intercession was made, on behalf of Peter, before the King of kings. No sacerdotal dress, was worn by any in the little throng. They met not under a wide and lofty dome, adorned with paintings in fresco; nor did they bow before a gorgeous "altar" or a crucifix. No intoned cries swept through incense-laden air, awakening echoes in vaulted aisles. They were a little band of disciples, in every-day dress, who held a prayer meeting in the private house of a poor widow; they continued, until a late hour of the night, to plead for the deliverance of one who was like a sheep in the teeth of a tiger; and though the watchman, as he passed the door, heard no sounds within, yet their prayers reached the angel world, and amidst the grand choruses of heaven were distinctly heard by the Mediatorial King. From that humble house, an unseen telegraph conveyed intercessory prayer to the Throne, and each suppliant's message vibrated, as if through an electric chord, to the very heart of the Son of God. How powerful is the prayer of the true Christian in moving that power which is everywhere supreme!

While these scenes were on earth, a very different scene, which mortals could not behold, was in heaven, Christ, as a Divine being, was in the midst of His disciples; but, as one whom they had personally known, He had entered within the veil, having "passed into the heavens," far above the blue vault that arches the earth,

and beyond the starry night lamps ; and while darkness covered earth and skies, and the hum of life was hushed in sleep, He who, when on earth, saw Nathaniel at prayer under his fig tree (John i., 48), though not near him, now looked down from His "high and holy place," and saw the captive in a cell, and heard the cries of the suppliants in their obscure retreat.

Our imagination is unable to follow Christ within the veil ; but, could the scenes amidst which He lives and reigns be imagined, and could they even be beheld, human language, with all its affluence, would be altogether inadequate, as a vehicle of description. Some faint glimpses of heaven, and of Christ in heaven, have indeed been given to us, and they fill us with a desire to be with Him in His glory. In that glory Peter was remembered and loved by Him. From that world the Lord looked down upon this ; and, though all the sublime glories of paradise were before Him, deigned to think of and to care for the frail yet devoted disciple whose life was in peril.

But could deliverance come from so distant a world ? It not only could come, but it did. The Lord could have set Peter free without employing anyone to execute His will, for a word spoken there would be all-mighty here ; but He deigns to employ His servants in offices of mutual love, and they delight in errands of mutual blessing. Does He ask, Whom shall I send ? Gabriel stands continually in His presence, hearkening to the voice of His word ; and Michael awaits His high command. Each one in the innumerable legions of angels is ready for any mission in obedience to His will (Matt. xxvi., 53). There are those who communed with the first human pair in their sinless estate, and who veiled their eyes, when the trembling culprits were confronted with their Judge, and returned to their native heaven. There stand the two who witnessed Abraham's audience with the Lord, who

accepted his hospitality, who entered Sodom in the costume of wayfaring men, and then, laying aside their disguise, stood forth revealed as executors of judgment, and rained down elements of destruction on the Cities of the Plain. The "destroyer," who, at midnight, slew all the firstborn of Egypt, or the destroying angel whom David saw with his fiery sword, would have been delighted to be sent on such an errand of love. Each of the seraphs who, in the hearing of Isaiah, sang sublime solos and joined in a chorus of praise in the temple, when the door-posts trembled at the sound of their voices, stood there ready to execute His will. He who delivered Daniel, enchainning the lions' mouths, when he was in their den, was ready to deliver Peter also. The herald of the Saviour's birth, the angelic choir who sang in the hearing of the Bethlehem shepherds, they who ministered to Christ after His temptation in the wilderness, he who comforted Him during His agony, the two who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, and, entering the cavern, sat, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of the dead Christ had lain, and the hosts of angels and risen men, two of whom appeared to the eleven apostles, and all of whom accompanied Him from the Mount of Olives up to heaven, all these and innumerable others awaited the expression of His will. Any angel in heaven would, at His word, have instantly come forth to be the deliverer of Peter. Whom, then, would He send, to fulfil the request of the lowly, to rescue the prey from the grasp of the spoiler; and thus to show to the little dignitaries of the State and of the Church, and to all the guilty city, that He whom they had crowned with thorns, and derisively robed with imperial purple, and who was set at nought by Herod and his men of war, and crucified, was the King of all kings; and that, enthroned in highest heaven, He laughed at royal and

sacerdotal malice, at military guards, and at massive walls and bolts and bars of iron ?

While the little throng continued, in Mary's obscure cottage, to plead with God for Peter's life, an angel of the Lord, being on the earth at the time, was directed to deliver him; or he came forth from within the veil, at God's command, silently and unknown to them, and, more swiftly than light, crossed stupendous, dark, and silent realms of the infinite, with inconceivable velocity passed by innumerable constellations of suns, with their groups of planetary worlds, and, as though familiar with the map of God's infinite monarchy, he singled out our sun, which in the distance would appear as one of the millions of stars that sparkle on every hand, proceeded direct to the night side of our earth, and alighted at Jerusalem; where he visited not the palace, nor even the temple, but instantly entered Peter's cell. What a transition of places would that be to this great and holy being, from the high and holy place, with all its angelic and divine glories, to the deep gloom and fetid air of an oriental dungeon, such as those which were in use in ancient and barbarous times !

In that cell three men, of whom Peter was one, lay asleep on the floor; and for an instant the angel stood looking on them all. How then did Peter sleep? Not as malefactors, on the eve of their executions, sleep, worried with agonies and fear, and harassed with dreams of horror. He slept peacefully, like a child in whose heart no guile has sunk deep shafts or burrowed dark and intricate mines, and on whose conscience are no burdens or blots of guilt. Peter's spirit was untroubled with guilty memories or with terror. The king, in his palace, slept not so tranquilly as the captive, of whose immolation he intended to make a public show; and yet *chains were on the prisoner's hands and feet, and, within*

the cell and outside the door, armed sentinels had him in charge. The presence of even an angel from heaven did not awake him. His spirit was stronger from his recent fall, and was now so undaunted that he was ready to redeem his broken vow, "Though I should die with Thee yet will I not deny Thee." So soundly, indeed, did Peter sleep that it was not until the angel had lifted him up, and set him on his feet, that he became fully awake.

When Peter awoke, the glorious form from heaven stood before him. He and his guards had been invisible to each other in the darkness, yet the angel was visible; so that the angel's countenance and person must have been luminous. His glory filled the cell with light. How unearthly and brilliant must that light have been! and yet he entered the city and the cell unchallenged by watchmen at the gate or at the door, and undiscovered by sentinels on the city walls, by shepherds tending their flocks in the fields, and by astronomical students, as they watched the slow movements of the heavenly bodies; for the Lord opened not their eyes to see him. Peter's guards neither heard the angel's footsteps, nor saw the halo of his person. Those guards consisted of four relays of four, in the night, so that each was relieved at the end of three hours; and sleep, when on duty, was punishable as a crime against martial law; and yet all the four, who were jailors of the apostle, were in deep sleep, and consequently were unconscious of the new arrival, from heaven, in the cell. The people of Jerusalem also were asleep, for it was midnight, and no one imagined that at that hour one of the princes of heaven was in the city, and still less that he was in so dismal a place as the common gaol. This instance, like others, shows that angels may be near to us when we see them not, and the sleep of all the soldiers, notwithstanding that their watch was of brief duration, suggests the possibility of the bodies

of men being, like their minds, subject to supernatural influence.

The streets of Jerusalem, in which were no lamps, were dark, silent and deserted. The last window-light, except where night-watchers ministered to the sick, was extinguished, and the footsteps of late street passengers had died away. In one of those narrow, unpaved streets, two figures, side by side, moved along towards the inner gate of the city. One was human, the other was robed in celestial glory, and had a countenance which, though human in form, was superhuman in splendour. The first had just emerged from a dungeon, dismal as a tomb, the other, since the last setting of the sun had probably walked on the golden pavement of heaven, and worshipped before the eternal throne. As the enchained apostle slept between his keepers, not a footstep broke the stillness of the cell, the usual tramp of sentinels outside the door, and of those who guarded the several wards of the prison, was suspended by the deep sleep which fell upon them all, and the busy hum of the city was hushed. In an instant the dark cell was filled with light, dazzling as the glory of heaven; light that was not of this world nor from the sun. A celestial figure stood within that halo of bright and burning glory, and with compassionate love he gazed on the slumberer on whose behalf intercession had been, and, at that moment, was being made with the the King of glory, and whose spirit, a few years later, was to be escorted by angels to their own glorious world. A voice, which at this hour may be heard in heaven, was then heard in Peter's cell, saying, "Arise up quickly." As the angel thus addressed the apostle, he also smote him on the side, and lifted him up, to wake him. Was Peter, as consciousness began to return, terrified at the sight of the angel, at the sound of his voice, or at the grasp of the superhuman hands? Such

an apparition was not altogether new to him. He would be quite familiar with the story of the appearance and words of the angels, at the Lord's resurrection, when they comforted the women, and struck the soldiers with mortal terror; and, doubtless, more details of their appearance were known to him than have been transmitted to us. At the transfiguration of Christ he saw a glorified human spirit, and a glorified human body, from heaven. A vision of "two men in white apparel" appeared to him, and to ten other apostles, at the ascension of the Lord, and they spake of the Lord's departure to heaven and of His return. Nor was this the first time that Peter had been delivered from prison by an angel; for when, some ten years before, he and John had been imprisoned for preaching Christ, an angel of the Lord appeared to them by night, opened the doors to release them, and directed them, not to escape, by departing to some distant place, but to return to the temple, as the place of greatest public concourse, and there to proclaim eternal life through Christ.—Acts v., 17—20. A second deliverance from prison, by an angel, was now being effected; and, possibly, in the person of the deliverer, Peter recognised the same radiant countenance, and the same celestial voice as before; neither of which could have been forgotten by him, or by any one who, like him, had seen and conversed with such a being as this angelic benefactor.

In lifting the half-awakened apostle from the ground, the heavenly deliverer lifted the burden of the chain also, that was on Peter's wrists, and from which it was necessary that he should be freed, before he could escape. A cell door and an iron gate, both closed and well secured, were fixed between the prisoner and freedom. The keepers, indeed, were profoundly unconscious of the scene, but how was he to be unchained? and how was an open way for his escape to be made? The angel had not any

mechanical implements with which to break or to cut the chains, and to open the prison doors; for he required none. God acts independently of such engines as those of men. The will of the Almighty acted on the obstacles to Peter's escape, so that the links of iron were dissolved, the chains fell from his hands and feet, and the prison door and the ponderous iron gate in the city wall, as though moved by unseen hands, or as though instinct, for the moment, with voluntary power of action, opened apparently of their "own accord," that Peter and his deliverer might pass. That gate, like all the other gates of the city, was made to resist besieging armies; and, twenty-five years afterwards, it did long resist an assailing force. When approached by the angel and Peter, it had been made fast for the night; and yet, though untouched by human hands, it opened for them to enter the city, and then closed; and, when morning light returned, all its fastenings were found as they had been left on the previous night. Peter described the action of the gate, not as it actually was, but as it appeared, when he told his wondering friends that "the gate opened to them of its own accord." A superhuman power acted on that gate; but to ask how it was opened, and how Peter was released from his fetters, were to ask, in effect, how miracles are worked. Even the agents by whom miracles were wrought, whether men or angels, knew not how they were wrought. Only He who instituted natural law knows how to suspend its action; for infinite knowledge belongs to Him only who alone is the possessor of almighty power.

Though Peter was delivered by a power superior to that of all natural law, it was only by the observance of that law that his health could be preserved. In no instance was law ever set aside when a desired end was attainable by obeying it. Natural law is most beneficent in its action, on all who obey it; but as causes always

produce correspondent effects, transgression never fails to result in punishment to the transgressors. Some little peril to Peter's health and comfort was incident to his deliverance. Upon his departure from the prison he would have to pass, in darkness, through several rough, and unpaved streets, on his way to Mary's house, and, had his feet been unsandalled, they would have been liable to be bruised and cut. Moreover the temperature of the midnight air, outside the prison, would be so much lower than that within, that a sudden transition from the stifling, warm air in the cell to the chilling air of the open streets, might have been dangerous to Peter's health unless, by sufficient clothing, he had been protected from cold. In the cell he had put off his sandals and his cloak, but now the angel directed him to put them on, and thus to be careful of his health and comfort. Besides, there was a commercial value in those two articles of clothing, common though they might be, which was appreciated even by an angel from heaven; and, just then, they were of great practical value to Peter. While we ask the Lord to protect us, we must also study self-protection, by the observance of all the laws of health, which He has ordained. As the angel accompanied the liberated apostle from the prison, through the gateway, and to the end of one street, he himself also was in the cold air and darkness of night; but he was not in any danger of lacerations or of disease, so that the precautions given by him to Peter were not needful for himself. How clearly do such simple incidents, as that relating to Peter's sandals and cloak, show that angels have thoughtful consideration and sympathy for the bodily safety, health, and comfort of the disciples of Christ! and herein they resemble Him who "knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust."

In accompanying Peter through the whole length of a

street, at a time when he was still under the power of sleep, the angel led him in the direction of Mary's house. Where that house was the visitor from heaven well knew; and he knew that the little prayer-meeting was still being held, that prayer offered at that meeting had brought him from heaven on his errand of love, and that the little band of Peter's friends, in that house, would joyfully receive and welcome him. For a short time, being only partially awake, being dazzled also with the angel's glory, and not fully able to realise the wonderful fact of his miraculous deliverance, Peter was so bewildered as scarcely to know whether or not it was real, or whether he was enchanted with the illusions of a pleasant dream; yet side by side the two pursued their way. What a wonderful companion was he with whom Peter walked! and what a delightful conversation one might have, on the mysteries and glories of heaven, with such a guide, so very near to us, on speaking terms, and during a five minutes' walk at night in a silent street! At the end of the street the deliverer stood still, bade the apostle farewell, until, in heaven, they should meet again, and, his mission being now fulfilled, he disappeared. His departure was as sudden as his appearance. As no night-watcher saw him approach, neither did any see him return; for neither in coming nor in going was the glory visible which illuminated the apostle's cell. He alone saw the angel's person, heard his voice, and felt his hands. By the time he was left alone, Peter's self-possession had fully returned. Until then he was as one that dreamed; for, as when the Lord was risen from the dead, his incredulous heart believed not for wonder and joy. As he walked alone, along dark and silent streets, seeing no one, and hearing no footfalls except his own, he gradually awoke to a full consciousness that his wonderful deliverance was *not an illusion but a fact*; he felt that his limbs

were free, that he breathed and freely walked in open air, and that shortly he should be among his friends, the disciples of the Lord; and, at length, as he pursued his way in solitude and in darkness, he said to himself, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."—**Acts xii, 11.**

CHAP. XV.

A KING SMITTEN BY AN ANGEL.

ON a great public occasion, King Herod, the third of that name, was instantaneously stricken with mortal anguish, as a direct judgment from God, inflicted by a superhuman agent; but neither he nor his friends knew how or by whom he was smitten. The facts are stated partly by Luke (Acts xii, 20 to 23) and partly by Josephus—Book 19, viii, 2. Herod received a deputation in the open amphitheatre of the fortress of Cæsarea, when he came forth in full state, arrayed in robes of silver tissue elaborately and beautifully worked, and appeared resplendent in the sunshine reflected by the burnished silver. After he had addressed the crowd, they cried out, "It is the voice of a god and not of a man;" and in servile flattery declared that, having revered him as king, they would thenceforth own him as superior to mortal nature. Thereupon they implored his mercy as a god. Being a Jew, Herod well knew how impious and how blasphemous was that ascription of divinity, but he welcomed it as a gratification to his vanity; delighted at being regarded as a living idol. "He gave not God the glory," and, because he thus permitted himself to be publicly saluted as a god, "the angel of the Lord smote him, he was eaten up of worms, and gave up the ghost." While in the very act of accepting divine homage in public, listening with pleasure to the idolatrous cries of the people, he was suddenly struck with great pain in the bowels, and, robed as he was in gorgeous apparel, he was *at once borne away from the scene, in a litter, and, after*

five days of fearful anguish, this human idol died, a mass of maggot life.

Josephus does not say that Herod was smitten by an angel, for indeed, how could he know? but the statement is made by Luke. Persons and things other than heavenly beings are occasionally denominated angels, in the holy Scriptures, and it may be that the Jews popularly represented diseases and death as angels. But Luke was a physician and an inspired writer, and in no instance is he open to the imputation of ignorance, error, or superstition. The agent was not merely an angel or messenger, but, "the angel of the Lord." Luke does not state that the disease was an angel, but that the cause of the fatal malady was in the fact that "the angel of the Lord smote him." This does not read like a figure of speech, or like a popular superstition, but like a simple matter of fact. In no instance, either in his life of Christ or in his memoirs of the apostles, does Luke use the word angel in an impersonal sense. He twice speaks of human messengers as angels, but in upwards of twenty instances, by angels he unquestionably means heavenly beings. Twice he speaks of angels of God, and in four places he employs the very words used in this narrative, "the angel of the Lord," and what is undoubtedly meant in each case is an intelligent personal being from heaven. The action of such a person, in the deliverance of Peter from prison, whither Herod had consigned him, with a view to public martyrdom on the morrow, is described in the narrative immediately preceding that of Herod's death. That angel was a living person, for he spake to Peter, opened the prison doors for his escape, and conducted him some distance through the city. The deliverer is designated "the angel of the Lord;" and, as the angel who smote Herod bears precisely the same designation, *written almost immediately afterwards, by the same*

writer, and probably at the same sitting, we may conclude that the same words have precisely the same meaning. Indeed the circumstances of the history suggest the probability that "the angel of the Lord" who delivered Peter out of the hand of Herod was the identical angel that slew the murderous tyrant who sought to destroy the Church of Christ, and delighted to be regarded as a god; and, if so, he was a deliverer on one occasion and a destroyer on another.

What then do we see in the cause of Herod's death? We see that the internal organs of a human body may be fatally acted upon by an angel from heaven. When the agonies of disease are suddenly felt, or when paralysis, apoplexy, or sudden death from organic disease of the heart, takes place, the event, however instantaneous it may be, is invariably the culminating result of causes long in operation. When man is smitten by man, or by any agency external to himself, the blow shows its effects upon the surface of the body; but Herod died not from physical violence, nor from any known cause. He was in a fortress, a crowd of flatterers surrounded him, and, as Josephus states, he was clothed "in a garment made wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture;" yet, in an instant, a supernatural power, acting in the very viscera of his body, "smote him," and the results were indescribable pain and a horrible death.

How a spiritual body acts on material bodies, it is impossible for us to understand; we only know how such bodies act on each other. Even chemical action is known to us rather by its phenomena than by its nature; for our knowledge is simply the knowledge of facts; and there is a great deal in all natural things which the most intelligent understand little better than the most ignorant. But how a spiritual being affected the bowels of a man, and suddenly *subjected* the healthy viscera to a painful

and deadly malady, it is wholly beyond all human philosophy to determine. The event resembles many natural facts in being inexplicable though not unknown.

This angel was unseen. The sudden and acute sensations of Herod were the only evidences of his presence. Though a crowd surrounded and idolised the king, and though all men then present saw one another, no man saw the angel who smote him. The angel passed through the air, in sunshine, yet his spiritual body was invisible as air. He came, he departed, and, during the brief instant of his presence, he fulfilled the errand on which he was sent; yet his presence on the occasion was altogether unknown. He, an angelic minister from before the throne of the Eternal, alighted among the throng of flatterers, immediately near to the object of their admiration; and, without wounding him externally, smote him in organs which are inaccessible to physical violence, except from without; but neither the idol nor the idolators were aware of the august presence. In relation to the elements and inhabitants of this world, we may, for the most part, confide in our senses and in our reason, but neither sense nor reason can be cognisant of the nature, presence, or action of the spiritual inhabitants of the unseen world. Innumerable facts, both in nature and revelation, are known to us as facts, but beyond that we know nothing about them.

This angel must have executed his mission with inconceivable velocity. Herod had persecuted the church, had murdered James, under forms of law, had attempted to murder Peter also, and now he had permitted himself to be invoked and worshipped as a god; and, as a just judgment, an angel of the Lord was sent to smite him with death. The Divine command was not given till *the very act* of sin had been committed. The angel then *came forth* from within the veil, more quickly than a

beam of light, executed the fatal judgment, and fled back from the awful scene. All this was done so rapidly that the cries of the idolisers were yet on their lips, and, at the moment when the angel smote him, still rang in the ears of their delighted idol. With our limited apprehensions of angelic capacities, we are wholly unable to estimate an angel's velocity of action.

The sin thus summarily punished was of all sins the most offensive to God. A mortal man accepted the homage that was due to God alone, thus permitting himself to be made a usurper of the throne of God, and to become guilty of high treason against the supreme and infinite majesty of Jehovah, notwithstanding that, as a Jew, he knew that the Lord his God was a jealous God, who had said, "My glory will I not give to another." —Is. xlii, 8. Herod desired to be not merely flattered but adored. Idolatry was the greatest sin of the heathen, and comprised in itself the elements of all sin; but when a Jewish king welcomed heathen worship, offered to him as a god, he was vain even to madness, and, in the moral insanity of the moment, he offered supreme insult to Him who alone is Most High; and, no sooner was this unexampled act of impiety committed, than the angel of the Lord showed, by a terrible judgment, that Herod the king was not a deity, but only a most arrogant and most miserable sinner, and corruption and dust.

CHAP. XVI.

THE PRESENT AGENCY OF ANGELS.

THE inhabitants of heaven do not now appear on the earth, as they did in Bible times; angelic apparitions having, since the times of the apostles, entirely ceased; for stars are not visible in daylight. No event is now foretold by angel voices, nor do angels appear to execute the judgments of God. They neither bring messages or commands from Him, nor do they make revelations of any kind to men; so that no man has heavenly visions now. No angel visibly walks amidst the beauties or grandeurs of earthly scenery, or careers over the heavens, amidst the terrors of a storm. Superhuman powers are never seen to interfere with the natural courses of events, so that there are no phenomena but such as arise from natural and moral laws, which, in the absence of miracles, are immutable. "All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Is all intercourse, then, between heaven and earth suspended? and are angels wholly absent from this world? These inquiries Revelation alone can answer, and Revelation does answer them; for the facts of the Bible show that angels, though unseen, are near. They may, indeed, be charged with important offices in other worlds also; but, perhaps, in no world can a more stupendous drama, fraught with eternally grand and terrible results, be acted than that now in process of development on the earth, in which each of us takes a part more or less important. Our Lord declared that angels take an interest even in *His* "little ones," and He described them as being "their angels."—Matt. xviii., 10. Though the inhabitants of the

earth are incalculable in number, and though that number increases every day, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God on account of the repentance of a single unit in the great aggregate of mankind.—Luke xv., 7 and 10. Had the Lord told us that angels rejoice upon the entrance of a redeemed sinner into heaven, it would have been less surprising, for they then have the joy of sympathy in his complete salvation; the joy of love in a new accession to their number—for each is happier in the contemplation of the blessedness of every other; and the joy of loyalty to God, in the extension of His reign of holiness, through grace to the sinful. They even lend their aid in the departure of human spirits from earth to heaven (Luke xvi., 22); and greater joy than men ever felt at the birth of an heir to empire, is occasioned by each new addition to their number. A sinner's repentance is less important than the forgiveness of his sins and the renewal of his heart, by which, in legal relations and in moral sympathies, he is allied to God and to heaven; yet even his repentance, as the first indication of a desire to be restored to harmony with moral law and to obtain eternal life, though he may not yet have sought forgiveness, occasions joy among the angels of God. The self-righteous religionists of our Lord's time looked haughtily on contrite sinners; but—reasoning with them on the basis of their own vain-glorious egotism, and describing them as they would describe themselves, as being just persons who had nothing to repent of—He declared that the repentance of even one of the sinners whom they despised was beheld in heaven with greater satisfaction than the moral condition of ninety-nine such men as they. But as angels cannot rejoice over an event of which they are ignorant, the penitence and impenitence of sinners must be known to them; and as there are other *human emotions* and acts, not less important than

repentance, those also must be known equally well; and must occasion more or less interest, in proportion to their importance. Nearly every man regards the moral condition and conduct of most other men with indifference, notwithstanding all the affinities of an identical nature, and feels little or no joy or grief on their account; yet the repentance of even one insignificant and vile but immortal man is regarded by these higher and holier beings, the inhabitants of heaven, with joy. How deep and loving, then, must be the interest which these august and holy creatures feel in our welfare!

Our Lord's revelation of the fact that angels carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, that is to say, to the presence and fellowship of Abraham, shows that they knew where Lazarus was before he died, and also when he was about to die, and that they knew that he was meet for heaven. The beggar lay on the bare ground and in the open street, and a rich man, close by, saw both him and the dogs that licked his sores; but he saw not the group of attendant angels that surrounded him in his last moments; nor indeed did the dying man himself discern them, so long as earthly objects were distinctly visible to him; but as earthly forms faded, the heavenly were revealed. The scenery of two worlds formed to him, as he was dying, a kind of dissolving view; in which indistinct and broken traces of very dissimilar objects were mingled and confused; those of earth, however, becoming fainter, as his power of bodily vision failed, and those of heaven becoming every moment brighter and more distinct; until, at length, the forms of men and the things of earth had vanished away, and the forms of attendant angels, in all their heavenly loveliness and glory, had become clear and real before him as life in heaven; he being, by that time, dead to earth, and alive *only to visions of heavenly blessedness and splendour.*

Now Revelation teaches great truths by facts and examples. Thus, the salvation of Paul is stated by himself to have been "a pattern," to show how great a sinner may be saved.—1 Tim. i., 16. In like manner, the instance of Lazarus being escorted to heaven is stated, not as a singular and exceptional event, but as "a pattern" to show the function of angels in relation to departed spirits. The human soul, when no longer "at home in the body," is in a new and abnormal condition, and, were there no ministering spirits, would be without a dwelling-place, or the solace of communion with beings of kindred nature and sympathies; but ministering angels from heaven are near, who direct and aid the departed spirit, and carry it to the world where are Abraham and all glorified men. As thousands of saved men depart every day, and are thus "carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom," numbers of angels must be constantly employed in this office of love; so that the presence of angels amongst us cannot be doubted. Wherever departed saints, upon leaving the body, may be, there also must be the angels. In the humblest cottage, in the superb palace, in the street, the factory, or the farm, out at sea where the wrecked perish in the storm, in the dark mine where the mortal frame is crushed to death, near to the expiring body—the victim of all-conquering disease, where the Christian suddenly "gives up the ghost," and among anxious and weeping ones, as they sorrowfully minister to the dying, there, unseen, are the angels of God. We, indeed, hear no angel footsteps in the deep stillness of a dying chamber, nor do we see angel forms awaiting the departure of even the holiest and most loving of human spirits. To us the attendant ones from heaven are absolutely invisible; for, as their mission on such occasions has relation only to the dying, their presence is not revealed to us.

When, just outside the rich man's grounds, Lazarus, surrounded with angels, lay breathing life away, he was seen by every one that passed by, and, though no one saw the celestial ones, they also were as really present at that spot as he was. In stating that angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, our Lord related not a parable but a fact. He recited a fragment of personal history. It was as truly matter of fact that angels carried Lazarus to the companionship of Abraham, as it was matter of fact that the rich man died and was buried. Being "in Abraham's bosom" was a saying in common use among the Jews, to describe being in heaven, and was their equivalent for our words "Being with Christ." That saying expressed not, perhaps, a literal fact, but a true idea, of the highest felicity and honour, in contrast with the beggar's despised and miserable earthly condition; and as the Lord was speaking to Jews, He chose to speak of heaven in Jewish phrase. What the ministers from heaven did for one heir of eternal life they must do for every other; for God is not a respecter of persons. There must, therefore, be literal truth in Pope's recital of the soliloquy of a saved soul, in the act of departing from the body to heaven,—

"The world recedes, it disappears,
Heaven opens on my eyes, my ears
With sounds seraphic ring."

In many instances holy Christians have, in their last earthly moments, gazed as if on superhuman objects immediately near, have expressed wonder that their friends should not see what they themselves distinctly saw, and have uttered such exclamations as the appearance of glorious ones from heaven might be supposed to evoke. And when the dying have been so far dead as not to be able to speak, or see, or hear, so that there *could not* be any further communication between them

and the earthly world, smiles have appeared on their countenances, which seemed to indicate recognition, welcome, and delight, in the spirit that still lingered in the body, as though enraptured with visions of heavenly attendants. Thus the irradiations of heavenly glories have been cast upon faces which, immediately afterwards, became rigid in death.

The revelations of God show that holy ones from heaven have useful offices to fulfil in relation to us, while we are in the body, though their agency is not known to sense or even to consciousness. The vulgar and ungodly world does not believe in heaven, as, practically, it does not believe in God. But the fact of spiritual agency is affirmed, interrogatively, as one which cannot be denied. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?"—Heb. i., 14. The word *all*, in this place, would appear to include human spirits also, as though both the angelic and human inhabitants of heaven, blessed as they are, have so deep an interest in the mission and work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, in saving souls, that they also have a ministry to fulfil on the earth, in reference to all who are acquiring a meetness for heaven.

It is now the Sadducean fashion to attempt to account for every event by the action of law, and, in so far, to live without God in the world. The pendulum of error has oscillated from the extreme of ignorance and trembling superstition, in mediæval ages, to that of the philosophic and materialistic unbelief in modern times. With affectations of contemptuous and intelligent independence of mind, the unseen is treated as unreal, while the agency of invisible beings enters not into the calculations of carnal, hard-headed men. Because phenomena which formerly were imputed, by the ignorant, to supernatural causes, are now known to be the effects of natural, social,

or moral law, law is held to be the only recognised cause of any effect; and even when such a phenomenon as a purely prophetic dream, or a dream in revelation, is altogether inexplicable, it is attributed to some "unknown law," and thus unbelief finds a plea in ignorance. Such pleas are atheistic. Visible causes are themselves the effects of the one almighty cause which is behind the veil of the visible. A living, supreme, and all-pervading will operates invisibly upon and through all things. Human philosophy may be deep, but in the divine philosophy are unfathomable and infinite depths. "All things are of God," so that our "times are in His hands," who "ruleth over all." The sovereign agency of God is invisible as God; and so also is the spiritual agency of angels; for it belongs to the region of mind, and relates to the conscience, the affections, and the will.

The church of Christ is a living witness to the existence and power of unseen agencies. While the doctrine of Divine and angelic influence pervades the whole theory, and is taught by many of the historical facts, of Christianity, the wonderful power which Christianity exerts, in the thorough conversion of prodigies of sin into eminently holy saints, in the personal and daily experience of all "who are obedient to the faith," in the triumphs of the dying, and in its ascendancy over idolaters and even over cannibals,—making men who had been savage as tigers to be gentle as lambs,—is a demonstration that superhuman influences attend its ministrations. In Christian congregations, while prayer and praise are being offered, and the gospel is being preached, such an all-subduing, hallowing, elevating, and delightful influence often prevails as never was known in any other assemblies. All the power of Christianity, in transforming human character, and in enabling Christians to triumph over death, is supernatural. Nothing equal to it or like it

was ever known in the world. The wonderful moral heroism, also, with which disciples of Jesus have sacrificed all things for Him, counting them as dross for His sake, and the joy with which, despite all the sensibilities and instincts of their nature, they have endured most frightful sufferings and martyrdoms, even in fire, testify to a power that is not of man.

All moral beings exert moral influences on each other; and God employs the agency of angels as He employs that of men. The revelations of a magnificent angel to Daniel show that, for successive days and weeks, human minds may be unconsciously subject to a direct moral influence from holy angels (Dan. x., 10-21); and Christ showed that a similar power for evil is possessed by evil angels; for He said that when an unclean spirit, "a strong man armed," is expelled from a human being by a stronger than he, he seeks a reinforcement in "seven other spirits more wicked than himself," and by their united forces they establish a dominion where the first, striving alone, had failed.—Luke xi., 21-26. As fallen spirits are not equally wicked, it may be inferred that the holy are not equally holy. Of the former some are more malignant than others, and of the latter some are more seraphic. It is only by Revelation that we know that either the holy or the wicked have any moral influence over us, for no man can clearly discriminate between that influence and the action of emotion and motive in himself; so that though, apart from the teaching of the Scriptures, the agency of angels amongst us could not be affirmed, it could not be denied. In individuals, and in aggregate bodies of men, impulses, purposes, and events, sometimes exist, which are explicable on the hypothesis of angelic influence, and are inexplicable on any other; so that this doctrine is a solution of facts in human experience which, were it rejected, *would be altogether unaccountable.* Thus, the

Jews were oppressed, in their captivity, as though the councils of their oppressors had been ruled by malignant beings; and they were afterwards treated justly and kindly, as though a beneficent agency had supplanted the evil; and, from the revelations of an angel to Daniel, we learn that, as matter of fact, evil angels did operate in the first instance and holy angels in the second.

The men whose spirit was thus acted upon were heathens, who would be unconscious of any superhuman influence, and ignorant of its existence. But we do not always know when we are influenced even by one another. Mutual influence, the influence of opinion, of character, of example, and of spirit, is to a large extent an influence of which we are unconscious. Life and health are also greatly affected by agencies which are unseen, which cause no immediate sensation, of which most men are profoundly ignorant, and which are only partly known to the most intelligent. It is scarcely possible for the human mind to know how far it acts under the influence of others, or the precise extent to which its action is unbiassed and free. The freedom of our will, our mutual reaction, the agency of angels and spirits amongst us, and the overruling power of God, are all co-existent; but when each begins, or how it acts, or where it ends, we cannot tell. The moral action of superhuman beings over us must be an intentional and therefore a conscious action, on their part; but we are affected by it unconsciously. In this matter, as in others, the human mind finds greater mysteries in itself than in the philosophies of the material world.

The active ministry of heavenly beings among men is distinctly taught in the inspired Scriptures; the idea of ministry, indeed, is implied in their very name, *messengers*. The recorded interpositions of angels were *visible displays* of themselves; but as they have been

present when they have not been visible, so they have exercised their ministry when it has not been manifest. They have a deep interest in our welfare. They study the doctrine and the practical work of human redemption; "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet., i. 12); and unto them is "made known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God."—Eph. iii., 10. They themselves are in no peril, and in the case of the fallen angels there is no hope; but we are probationers, who, upon our departure from this life, shall either be partakers of their felicity and glory, or be sent to dwell with the devil and his angels, and the great issues at stake awaken a profound interest in the holy and loving ones of heaven, and in the malignant ones of hell; and their moral influence, like that of good and evil men, tends to make us good or evil, like themselves.

The number of ministering angels is incalculable. In having come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly and church of the First-born, enrolled in heaven, to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, we have also come "to an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. xii., 22); words which indicate association and communion with angels innumerable. Because Jacob met a host of angels, he called the place Mahanaim, or Encampment.—Gen., xxxii., 2. An angel who appeared to Joshua announced himself as "the captain" or prince "of the host of the Lord."—Josh. v., 14. Hosts of angels surrounded Dothan, and covered an adjacent hill, in defence of Elisha. The Divine name, "the Lord of hosts," has no reference to starry hosts, and still less to military hosts, but to "the hosts of the Lord." "The chariots of God are twenty thousands, even thousands of angels." Ministering angels would thus appear

to be innumerable, or myriads, as in the Greek. Their agency among men is so coincident, in character and in tendency, with that of the Holy Spirit, that it is as impossible to distinguish them as to separate commingled rays of light.

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."—Ps. xxxiv., 7. The metaphor is militant, and shows that angelic safeguards surround us for defence and deliverance. "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways, they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."—Ps. xci., 11, 12. Our perils, as moral beings, are analogous to those of a pilgrimage, in which we may stray, or stumble and fall; but angels, indeterminate in number, are charged to direct and sustain us in all our ways, and their spiritual action in our behalf is like that of skilful, soft, and gentle hands, while their eyes, as those of holy and loving friends, are always over us, even in solitude. The heavenly aid may be felt in our moral nature, though not clearly understood, and regenerate hearts go forth heavenwards, as though in response to the gracious influences of heavenly beings.

When Satan tempted Christ, he gave a literal interpretation to this Divine promise, and he sought to pervert its true meaning, in quoting it, by omitting the words which specify the object of the angels' guardian care, namely, "to keep thee in all thy ways;" for as errors lead to sin, every tempter seeks for sanction in some error. The one only object of the celestial ministers is to keep us in the ways of holiness, in which we are so beset with the perils of sin, that our weakness and exposure constrain us earnestly to invoke the aid of God. We have wandering eyes and feeble knees, hands prone to hang down, and faintings of heart, and, wearied in the strifes of this world, our strength fails us; we are haunted with

apprehensions and oppressed with dejection, and sometimes even despair draws near and casts its black shadow over our path. But in all these experiences we have the sympathies and aids of ministering spirits. Still small voices speak to our listening heart; holy and soothing influences steal gently over our troubled spirit; gleams of light shine forth upon our gloom; sustaining forces are felt, when we are burdened; heavenly attractions draw our spirit towards heaven; when straying from Christ, emotions arise within us which lead us quickly to retrace our steps; when slumbering in the way, we are waked up to energy and action; when tempted to wilful sin, trembling fears, like terrifying spectres, pass reproachfully before us, and transfix us, as in the light of God's throne, with emotions of shame and horror; and, in desponding moments, we feel counteracting inspirations of energy and hope, so that with braver hearts and bolder steps we renew the strife with suffering and sin, and press onwards in the pursuit of eternal life. When Jesus was in His agony, an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him; and the ministrations of that comforter represented those of which we are recipients, when hallowing, soothing, and sustaining influences come over us, we know not whence or how.

Many events occur in the experience of men which cannot be accounted for by any known or imaginable law; and, sometimes, successions of incidents are evolved like the scenes of a drama, as though plots were determined and conducted by agencies unseen, and in which the visible actors, though free, seem to act like automatons. Prophetic dreams of events and of spoken words, and distinct presentiments of calamity, have been circumstantially and literally verified. Ideas of immense practical value, and thoughts, like rays of light, have entered human minds, unsought, and as though injected by some one

other than ourselves. Occasionally we are moved by impulses which are unaccountable and almost irresistible. When stricken with anguish by some heavy blow, we experience a superhuman calmness, and a sustaining power which are felt to be not of ourselves, but from an extrinsic source, as though our spirits were upheld by angels' hands. Suggestions, like those of inspiration, involuntarily spring up in our hearts; and we have true impressions which we cannot resist, and for the existence of which we are unable to account. Two contrary and conflicting agencies are commonly at work within us, as though we had two opposite moral natures, good and evil, striving for ascendancy, as distinctly and as consciously as though, in every man, there were two inward men of diametrically opposite character. How comes all this to be? On the hypothesis of natural law it is all inexplicable. But the Bible accounts for it all, by declaring that there are "ministering spirits" whom God has sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation; and the teachings of the Bible are confirmed by the deepest emotions of our nature. The "lying spirit," the "unclean spirit," and "wicked spirits," enter into a man, to move him, by moral influence, to sin. In some cases their dominant sway becomes so great as to amount to moral insanity; the sinner is like one "possessed of devils," and, yielding to evil forces, he plunges headlong into sin. The "ministering spirits" exert a counteracting influence against the evil, they aid our struggling will in each inward conflict; and, in communion with them, holy, loving, devout, and heavenly emotions are superinduced within us.

These heavenly beings are not mediators, that we should pray to them. The office of mediator belongs to the glorified Saviour. Theirs is a humbler function; for *they intercede* only with us. Their ministry is owing to

the mediation of Christ, who is the re-connecting ladder between heaven and earth. Through Him they come forth from within the veil, and are co-workers with the Holy Spirit, in His offices of grace and love. Thus, they who are holy, blessed, and strong, seek to aid the weak, the impure, and the miserable; and thus, though unseen, they continue to prosecute the ministry in which, in ancient times, they occasionally became visible. While Satan prowls about, like a beast of prey, seeking whom he may devour (1. Peter, v., 8), they, with pastoral love, would gather and guide us into the fold of God. We are thus indebted to hands which we cannot see, and receive spiritual blessings from God through channels which we cannot trace; and not until we have passed the veil of mortality, behind which our heavenly benefactors dwell, shall we personally know them. Guardian angels belong not to the realms of romance, but to the highest realms of fact.

Superhuman influence does not interfere with our moral freedom, or with our responsibility; for in truth we are subject to innumerable influences, from each other, without such interference. Nor does it detract from the blessedness of heaven; for heaven, though a place, is also a condition. The presence of "ministering spirits" among us does not disturb their enjoyment of the harmonious dispositions of their own nature, or of the approving love of God. Wherever heavenly beings are, there heaven is. In ministering to us they do the will of Him whom it is their supreme delight to serve; nor does their knowledge of our miseries diminish their blessedness, which they have in themselves and in God, as it does not diminish the infinite blessedness which God has in Himself.

When it is asked, "Are they not all ministering spirits?" there is no limitation to the number; and the words "all ministering spirits," may, and probably do, include the

spirits of departed men. Indeed, that human spirits are "ministering spirits" is distinctly taught by the Saviour, in the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus. The lost spirit, Dives, importuned the glorified spirit, Abraham, to send a third spirit, Lazarus, as a ministering spirit, to his five brothers, who were then alive, that he might testify to them, so that they might not be tormented in his flame. The request was denied, and the sufficiency of the written revelation, to convince unbelievers of the reality of a future retribution, was affirmed; but the impossibility of such a messenger being sent from heaven to earth was not declared, it being only declared to be impossible for such a messenger to afford relief to the lost. An impassable gulf was said to be fixed between the two spirit worlds; but between heaven and earth there is no such gulf. Lazarus could not go to the world in which Dives was, and that he could not go was one of the two reasons assigned why he did not. When the rich man heard that impossibility affirmed, he assumed it to be possible for a messenger from heaven, who could not be sent to assuage his own torment, to be sent to his brothers, to persuade them; and we may infer that, by not denying that possibility, Abraham tacitly admitted it. But "ministering spirits" are not sent to the carnally minded, worldly, and unbelieving. Indeed such men would not be persuaded even though a saint from heaven were to appear before them. The heavenly ones are charged to minister to those only who are heirs of salvation; and how congenial to them must such ministrations be! The glorified inhabitants of heaven, by ministering to the heirs of heaven, still take an active interest in the inhabitants of the world with which, before their departure from the body, they were most intimately associated, and with which they are still united in loving sympathy. The rich man's prayer shows that even after his death, and in hell, he retained

his memory and his fraternal love ; and that heavenly ministrations on earth were known to him even there. Since, lost as he was, he was anxiously concerned about the eternal well-being of his brothers, how much deeper and holier an interest in their welfare might he have felt, had he been holy and glorified ! All heaven looks down upon earth ; and all the earth, with its great scenes of suffering and of conflict, is open before the eyes of heaven ; and, notwithstanding the absence of visions, ministers of heavenly love are present with our dying, who die in the Lord, in our crowded temples, in obscure retreats—where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, and in our closets of silent and secret prayer.

CHAP. XVII
THE ANGEL WORLD.

WHEN angels visited this world, whence did they come? and, upon their departure, whither did they go? Each one is instinct with life, has a personal consciousness, and is a being of defined and limited form, and of spiritual substance, which mortal eyes have beheld, and, consequently, each angel must be somewhere; and in whatever place he may at one moment be, he must, at that moment, be absent from every other. Heaven is, in one sense, a state or condition of mind, so that every holy intelligence has a heaven in himself; yet heaven as an inhabited world, must also be a place, and as a place it is commonly revealed to us in the Scriptures.

The ancient servants of God, to whom angels appeared, could have had only vague conceptions of the residence of their celestial visitors; for they did not know aught of any world other than this. In their imagination the earth was a fixed and boundless plane, and above it was a huge pavilion, an overhanging concave, in which the sun, moon, and stars were in constant motion, mysteriously descending below the western horizon, only to reappear from beneath the eastern, to renew, in semicircles, their endless succession of journeys. We, however, are enabled by modern discoveries to understand the true theory of the universe, and our conceptions have been so enlarged that, though the precise locality of the angel world cannot be known, with certainty, until we pass within the veil, yet conjecture has been formed, based on the discoveries of science and the revelations of the Bible, and the conjecture appears to contain the elements of strong probability.

The earth is our platform of observation and inquiry, and from the earth we look round, in the infinite, in search of heaven. Other globes, now known to be suns, planets, and moons, appear in revelations of light. Men have mapped the sidereal heavens, and have named every distinguished object in the universe of worlds. The nearest globe to our own is continually rolling round it; but, when the telescope brings it almost within hailing distance, it is distinctly seen to be incapable of being inhabited; for all its mountains and valleys present surfaces of bare rock, in wild and savage desolation and grandeur; with neither verdure, water, or air, as though it had been created, and been caused to roll ceaselessly round the earth, only to reflect sunshine on the earth's night side. The sun is an infinitely grander world than the moon, and is four hundred times greater in diameter; yet, being also four hundred times more distant, it presents a disk of similar size. From countless millions of planetary worlds, our sun must appear as a star, like the multitudes we see in dark skies. A stupendous ocean of brilliant and burning splendour surrounds it, so that its entire surface is in perpetual sunshine. Where there is no darkness there can be no sleep, and where there is no sleep it may be supposed that there is no weariness; for all the analogies of nature show that, in all creatures, there are perfect adaptations to the elements in which they live. If, then, the sun be inhabited, the inhabitants must be a different class of beings from ourselves, and they must live amidst conditions inconceivably different from ours. As our sun is only one among hundreds of millions, and as, in magnitude, it is inferior to many, no reason why angels should reside there can be imagined which would not equally apply to every other; so that heaven cannot be in the sun.

The Bible speaks of heaven as the world in which God

appears, in state, to the highest of all creatures, and as the abode of glorified men. Angels there "stand continually in the Presence of God." The Son of God, in His glorified temple of humanity, is there present; and there, too, before "the throne of God and of the Lamb," are the redeemed of the Lord, who have been translated from the earth; and before the throne both men and angels are in their highest heaven. Where, then, and what is heaven?

All the Bible revelations of heaven show that heaven is a place, and that it is high above, and distant from the earth. When, in the days of Hezekiah, the priests and Levites prayed to God, "their voice was heard and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven."—2 Chron. xxx., 27. These words clearly teach that, though God is everywhere present, at the same time and at all times, He has a "holy dwelling-place," or, as in the margin, "a habitation of His holiness, even heaven." "The Lord looketh from heaven. From the place of His habitation He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth."—Ps. xxxiii., 13, 14. "Look down from heaven," prayed the prophet Isaiah, "and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory."—Is. lxiii., 15. Moses also said, "Look down from Thy holy habitation, from heaven."—Deut. xxvi., 15. "The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven."—Ps. xi., 4. "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool."—Is. lxvi., 1. What this globe is, as a mere footstool of God, all other globes are; for heaven, where is His throne, is incomparably greater than the greatest of all other worlds. Our Lord Himself stated that "heaven is God's throne."—Matt. v. 34. "He hath prepared His throne in the heavens."—Ps. ciii., 19. Jehovah Himself, speaking of His habitation, said, "I dwell in the high and holy place."—Is. lvii., 15. And

Lucifer, a fallen angel, who, having dwelt in heaven and worshipped before the throne, well knew where heaven was, audaciously said, in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Is. xiv., 13); thus showing that he knew that the throne of God was "above the stars."

Heaven, as a place, was anciently represented by a place on the earth. That place was "the holiest of all," "the holy of holies," within the veil of the tabernacle, and afterwards of the temple, of Israel. Because the Shekinah, the visible symbol of the Divine presence, abode there, over the mercy seat, that "most holy place" was called the habitation of God.—Ex. xv., 13, Ps. lxxvi. 2. But Paul declared that "the holy places made with hands" were "figures of the true," and that they were "patterns of things in the heavens."—Heb. ix., 23, 24. The yearly entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies, when he passed within the veil, to offer, in symbol, the atonement for sin, was also a pattern and a figure of the entrance of the great High Priest "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (*Ibid.*). In His risen and glorified body, He visibly ascended from the earth, and, having passed within the veil, He "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."—Heb. xii., 2. Thus the "high and holy place" of God's habitation and throne in heaven was visibly depicted by the place of His habitation and throne of grace on the earth.

As there must be some correspondence between the habitation and the Divine and infinitely glorious Inhabitant, what incomparable grandeurs must be in heaven! They are not, however, the grandeurs of a solitude. God dwells not there alone. The King of all worlds has sur-

rounded His throne with a magnificent Court. He, indeed, does not ostentatiously manifest His glories; for He arches earthly skies with rainbows, and adorns earthly scenes with landscape and floral beauties where men are not present to admire them; and He did so long before the era of man; because He Himself delights in forms of beauty. But all the revelations of "the habitation of His holiness, even heaven," represent it as a peopled world, so that each angel and each glorified man might say, as Gabriel said, "I stand continually in the Presence of God." The Omnipresent is not more truly present in one place than in another; but His dwelling-place, His throne, and His glory, are in that world as they are not in any other. As the scene of highest homage and of supreme blessedness, and as the centre of infinite government, heaven is at once the temple and the metropolis of the monarchy of God; and the revelations of His glory to the celestial hierarchy transcend those made on the earth, as the nature and capacities of angels are superior to those of embodied and mortal men.

What heaven is may be inferred, partly, from what its inhabitants are known to be; seeing that there are exact correspondences between all creatures and the places of their residence. In heaven are glorified men who never died, and men who arose from the dead—the resurrection saints; glorified men who are disembodied are there; and there also are all ranks of angels. Heaven, as the dwelling place of intelligent and holy beings, in several conditions, must have adaptations to the nature of all; and as it is inhabited by material and spiritual beings, it must be, in an indescribable because an unknown sense, a material and spiritual world; and those glorified and glorious beings, are in the presence of God, as the inhabitants of no other world are or can be. Heaven is the "*Father's house*" in which "*are many mansions*" (John)

xiv., 2); and in those numerous mansions places are specially prepared for, and perfectly adapted to, the nature and condition of all ranks and orders of intelligent beings. Variety may exist, in the conditions of life in that world, to a much greater extent than on earth, for heaven is much greater and grander than earth. As heaven has, presumably, the same relations to every other world that it has to this, every other province of intelligent creation may be there represented, in common with this, in the persons of its translated and glorified inhabitants; and, if so, there is a perfect unity in the great variety of the holy beings of many worlds, and in the alliance they have, in common, to the eternal throne. Many mansions are prepared for them all, in that great house of God; but how many is not stated. The mansions may be as numerous as the classes of inhabitants that have been translated thither, and as the worlds from which they came. For us "a place"—not places—is prepared by the Lord of life and glory; and, as a prepared place, it is perfectly adapted to our nature. No wonder that Paul, after the "abundance of revelations" made to him, desired to depart to such a place, and to such an assemblage as Christ has gathered therein, and that he should declare that "to die is gain." The inhabitants of heaven are glorious beings, but heaven itself must be infinitely more magnificent than they; even as this world transcends its inhabitants in magnitude and in grandeur.

The whole of the visible universe of worlds appears, from most exact and oft-repeated observations, to be in silent, rapid, unceasing, and magnificent revolution around a common centre; and it is assumed that in that centre is heaven. To comprehend the idea of a grand central world in the universe, the theory of the universe must be known; so that *had* such an idea been revealed by the

prophets or the apostles, it could not, until recently, have been understood. But though not revealed, it is in harmony with all Bible allusions to heaven; and, while it has thus an implied sanction, it reflects new and beautiful light upon language which, though sublime even in its vagueness, could not have conveyed to the minds of the ancients any but vague and indefinite conceptions of the locality, greatness, and magnificence of "the third heaven," "the heaven of heavens," "the high and holy place," the "throne above the stars of God."

If heaven be the central and metropolitan world of the universe, the analogies of the universe suggest that, though each sun has light in itself, all suns may have some such relation to heaven, as planets have to them. Our sun is said to be six hundred times greater in bulk than the aggregate of the globes that circle round it; and, having in themselves no vitality, light, or beauty, these globes would, in the absence of solar action, be dark, cold, naked, and dead. While each sun is the centre of a group of worlds, all suns constitute one vast group, with heaven in the centre of all; and, presumably, heaven transcends them all in greatness and in grandeur, just as they also exceed, in magnitude and in splendour, the globes that revolve around them. What an incomparable world, then, must heaven be! and how replete must it be with incomparable glories! The existence of such a world as that now supposed would be conformable with the order and harmony of all creation. Such a heaven would be worthy of our sublimest and most cherished hope; and such a habitation of God, such a throne of infinite power and glory would bear some correspondence with the glories of the Infinite and Eternal One. There He has "all His holy angels with Him," and there they and all the glorified throngs from this, and possibly from other worlds, are favoured with all-transcending revelations of Himself, of

His works, and of His love; and all so enjoy His infinite munificence, and so worship Him, as no creatures can in any other world.

The high and holy place of the universe is not visible from this world, and may not be from any other; for there are not such affinities between its glory and the eyes of any creatures, inferior to angels, as that they should be naturally able to see it. As a world inhabited by the natural and the ennobled aristocracy of creation, and as the glorious habitation of God, it may be as unlike, as it is superior to, the greatest of solar worlds. For us to see heaven would require the supernatural power by which men have occasionally seen angels; but though we have not that power, we may infer how glorious heaven is, from the glories of their persons, when they were visible; for not only were their appearances visible demonstrations, even to human senses, of the actual existence of heaven, but some faint glimpses of the splendours within the veil were apparent in their personal glories. Other revelations of heaven were made in the hieroglyphs of earth, for it may be that they could not be otherwise made; but, as the brilliant colours of tropical productions suggest ideas of the splendours of tropical scenery and of the tropical sun, so revelations of angels were, to a greater or less extent, revelations of heaven. It is only by the interpretations of modern science, however, that we elicit from the revelations of the Bible all that we now know of the locality, magnitude, and glory of heaven, and of its astronomical relations to all other worlds, as the central and grandest world of all, the home of angels and the throne of God.

PART SECOND.

CHAP. I.

MAN A LIVING SOUL

IN the early records of the Bible, the doctrine of our immortality, like that of the existence of God, is not asserted as a dogma, but is implied in statements of fact. Had Revelation opened by propounding the highest truths, in abstract forms, as articles of faith, after the manner of a formulated creed, the words might, in the course of time and amidst the mutations of language, have come to denote new ideas, the original ideas being obscured or lost; but some of those truths were taught by implication, in language which, as that of simple narrative, could scarcely be misunderstood. Thus the history of creation teaches that there was a Creator; for He must have existed before He created. The material universe is a monumental demonstration, not only of His existence, but of His infinite power, skill, and goodness. All this is implied in the one statement of fact, that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The existence of the human spirit, as an entity distinct from and superior to the body, was not declared in philosophical language, but it was logically and obviously implied in the history of its origin. The human body, though the noblest form of animal life, is purely animal. But man is a spirit, with intellectual and moral powers, as well as an animal; and to understand our spiritual nature is almost as difficult as to understand "the nature

of angels." "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding."—Job xxxii., 8. That spirit which, as Christ said, "hath not flesh and bones," is as actual an entity as is the body. It was originally an emanation from the Infinite Spirit; and, as an inspiration from Him, it has, though finite, divinity in its very nature.

The body is a house, with an inhabitant. The inhabitant was not made like the body, or at the same time as the body, nor was it constituted of the same elements as the body. The body is all of earth; the spirit is wholly of God. He breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life.—Gen. ii., 7. This is, indeed, the language of metaphor, for, as God is purely a spirit, He does not breathe; but in the metaphor there is a meaning. In the breath of a breathing creature a portion of its body is exhaled, and what was an element of that body is in the breath. The breath of God, as an inspiration from Him, entered the body of man; and, as the human spirit proceeded from the Divine Spirit, its nature is kindred to His, and it is immortal like Him. Until then man was a living body, he now "became a living soul." The living soul was the man; not a property which he possessed, but a nature, a being, which he himself was. The body was from the earth, the living soul was from the earth's Creator. Its nature is as dissimilar from and superior to that of the body, and to the life and the animal instincts of life in the body, as spirit is or can be different from matter. Abstract ideas are transmitted, by electric forces, across continents and oceans, through telegraphic lines, but in their nature they are perfectly distinct from and superior to those lines and forces; and so ideas evolved in the human brain, and communicated through nerves and other organs, have not any nature in common with the *bodily organs*. They are the offspring of the thinking

and intelligent power, which acts, in one case, on the brain and nervous system, and, in the other, on the medium and on the force of telegraphic transmission, the wire and the battery.

If the spirit and the body were identical, food would nourish the first and instruction the second; greatness or littleness of character would be logically inferred from stature and bulk, intellectual power from muscular strength, and imbecility from bodily weakness. In that case, too, the destruction of an organ or the loss of a limb would involve corresponding injury to the spirit; but, as matter of fact, if the four limbs were cut off, and the organs of sight, smell, hearing, and speech were destroyed, the living soul, the "inward man," would still be complete in itself; for the spirit is neither a part nor a property of the body. Pulsating life and animal instincts may have been in the living body before it became the tenement of the living soul. The living soul lives always, and does not, from any law of its own nature, die. We do not understand how the soul lives apart from the body, but neither do we understand how it lives within the body; for natural facts, though known, are not understood. Like Him from whom it emanated, it has life in itself; so that its consciousness is as perfect when it is absent from as when it is present in the body. In some instances, when the body is dying and is almost dead, the mental and moral faculties retain all their wonted force; and thus the spirit, at the time when materialism supposes it to be at the point of annihilation, asserts its undiminished power, vigorous, fearless, and triumphant to the very last.

The whole substance of the body is subject to the law of incessant change—like a wave of water, which changes its substance while retaining its form—but consciousness *is* immutable; and being exempt from the law of change,

it is also exempt from the kindred and consequent law of death. The body consists of an indeterminate number of particles, but the living soul is one and indivisible; and its simple unity shows, like its unchanging identity, that its nature is dissimilar and distinct from that of the body. It is, indeed, affected in action and development by the age and health of the brain; but the brain is equally affected by the spirit, for reaction is mutual and reciprocal; and purely mental action impairs appetite, superinduces diseases, and causes instant death. If, therefore, the argument proves that we have not a spirit, it equally proves that we have not a body, and thus, by proving too much, proves nothing.

The spirit forms immaterial ideas, perceives and demonstrates immaterial truths, is actuated by immaterial motives, and is susceptible of immaterial impressions, and, consequently, as the cause must be adequate to the effect, the spirit itself must be immaterial. The spirit and the body, though so united as to constitute one man, possess no powers or properties in common. The spirit corrects and controls the impressions of sense. It thinks and reasons on abstract truths; for it has abstract powers. Moral motives govern it; for it has a moral nature. Freedom of will, the high prerogatives of conscience, illimitable capacities of intelligence, and moral responsibility, are attributes of the living soul. An animal may be diseased, and the creature of instinct may be vicious, but a living soul, like a fallen angel, may sin. Instinct is intuitive, it relates only to animal life, it knows none but material objects, it is developed but it cannot grow, and a thousand generations of the creatures of instinct are unimproved, unimprovable, and stereotyped editions. But the living soul is a miniature image and likeness of the natural and moral attributes of God, and *either enjoys His friendship and approving love, or*

endures a moral sense of His displeasure. Can it be believed, then, that man inherited the powers of an angel, only to inherit the destiny of a brute?

Every earthly creature, after its maturity, decays and dies. Plants and trees can only grow and yield flowers and fruits, animal bodies cease to grow, and instinct has limits which it cannot pass, but the capacities of the living soul are illimitable; and so great is its superiority to the body, that it may enjoy ecstasies when the body is in agonies; or it may endure agonies at a time when the body is in perfect health.

The highest hopes and the greatest fears of the living soul relate to its future life. In that life the expiring martyr looks for his reward, and just retribution in that life is the object of the sinner's dread. The very instincts of moral goodness and of moral guilt thus speak of immortality; and the incompleteness of the Divine administration, in this life, identifies the certainty of the life that is to come with that of the existence of the eternal throne. The idea of immortality is an intuition. Even when men are blinded by unbelief, and debased by sensuality, the voice of God speaks of eternity in the human heart.

The living soul is the living man. It is the I and the ME, of which other things, even including the body, are but possessions, agents, and instruments of action. Being the offspring of the Eternal, it is the one only existence in this world that does not die; for it belongs to the order of intelligent and moral beings. Except through its union with the body it has nothing in common with this world; and, amidst the ravages of disease, the carnival of death, the complete dissolution of all things in the grave, the rise and fall of empires, and the revolutions of all time, the living soul, like Him of whom it is and from whom it came, survives all ruins and lives for ever.

CHAP. II.
DEATH A SLEEP.

IN the book of Job—that most ancient of all books—death is represented as a sleep in the dust, from which the sleeper will not awake until the heavens shall be no more.—Job vii., 21, and xiv., 12. God himself said that Moses should sleep with his fathers.—Deut. xxxi., 16. The same beautiful image of death is employed in the Psalms, and in the records of the deaths of the kings of Judah. In the New Testament, also, Jesus said, when Lazarus was dead, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep” (John xi., 11); and He said of a girl, whose death was bitterly lamented by her friends, that she was not dead, but that she slept.—Matt. ix., 24. Indeed, death was commonly regarded, in ancient times, as a sleep. This metaphor is found even in pagan classics; but the pagan idea was that of a man of ripe age gently expiring in bed, and sinking into unconsciousness, never to reawake. The Bible idea of death, as a sleep, is so different from the pagan idea, that even Stephen, who died from being publicly stoned, by a pitiless and frenzied crowd, and whose body, in death, must have been a frightful spectacle, is said to have fallen asleep.—Acts vii., 60.

Before we go to sleep we divest ourselves of clothing; and, in dying, we are divested of the cares, pleasures, habits, and pursuits of earthly life. We cast them all off, and our successors put them on; and they also will, like us, leave them in the world in which they found them. Our body is as a garment of flesh to our spirit; death *unclothes* us, and, leaving our mortal dress behind

we pass within the veil, and enter the world of angels and spirits. As, after each day's toil, we succumb to weakness and heaviness, and find rest in sleep, so in death we find welcomed relief from the exhaustion and pain of a dissolving body.

There are kindred mysteries in sleep and in death. In each state there is unconsciousness in the body, and inaction in the several organs of communication with the outside world. How silent are the lips which, in wakefulness, are formed in smiles, and which breathe forth in words the incense of feeling, the energies of thought, and the melodies of song! How deaf the ears become which catch the faintest whisper, and through which instruction enlightens and music entrances the soul! And how blind, even to light, are the eyes in sleep and in death! The sleeper is in fact, in relation to the world around him, in the condition of temporary death.

The sleep of death is not a "soul sleep," for that means the death of the soul. Moses slept with his fathers, as God said, but his fathers were at that time alive; for the Lord said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" and thus He made a revelation of the continued life of the fathers as well as of His own. He who spake the words interpreted them, when He said that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" and He thus showed that the dead, as spirits, are alive, and, in being their God, that they worshipped and served Him. Paul repeatedly spoke of departed saints as being asleep (Cor. xv., 18, and 1 Thess. iv., 14, 15), but he never gave even an implied sanction to the opinion that they were in a state of unconsciousness. On the contrary, he distinctly taught that they were consciously with Christ, and that the Lord would "bring with Him," upon His return to the earth, all that now sleep in Him. The

Lord Himself, also, taught that His disciples should be with Him in His glory, and that they should, when with Him, behold His glory.—John xvii., 24. "They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and the Lamb feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters."—Rev. vii., 15, 17. All this shows that they are unceasingly conscious and unceasingly active. Certainly, heaven is not a dormitory of sleeping spirits, or a necropolis of spirit mummies, but a city of living souls, a nightless region of highest life, service, and enjoyment; so that inspired writers, who would have shrunk from a long sleep of the soul, as from temporary extinction, regarded life in that world as being infinitely preferable to life in this.

Sleep, in relation to the soul, is the kinsman of death only as an image of the peacefulness with which the true Christian dies. No circumstances could be more calculated to disturb the serenity of a departing spirit than those amidst which Stephen died; for religious zealots, in blind fury, killed him, with a ferociousness hardly conceivable now, pelting him with great stones, and inflicting frightful suffering, as though he had not been fit to live; but, so far from being terrified, his spirit was calm as heaven, so that in dying he "fell asleep." Human bloodhounds, to "do God service," pursued him to the very threshold of heaven; yet he passed within the veil untroubled by human passion, and possessed of "the peace that passeth understanding." Many disciples of the Lamb sleep thus peacefully in death. Their outward man may be a wreck of its former self, but their inward man is peaceful, in its departure hence, as it was wont to be, night after night, when they resigned themselves to sleep.

Death, like sleep, is a temporary condition. The sleeper awakes to consciousness, activity, and enjoyment, as

though renewed life had returned; and so will the dead. They "sleep in Jesus," that is through or by means of Jesus, for the word is *dia*, through, not *en*. The maid whom the Lord raised, at Capernaum, was not dead like a mere animal, she only slept.—Matt. ix., 24. Her father and friends who, in their great grief, "laughed Him to scorn," were probably Sadducees; but, by recalling her spirit, Christ gave demonstration, from its identity, that it had not become extinct, and that her death, like sleep, was only for a time. The girl's spirit was not awaked, like her body; it "came again" from heaven, whither it had been.

The soul of Lazarus was absent from the body for a longer period than that of the ruler's daughter, and his body, as such, was in a worse condition than hers; but the lapse of time and the processes of decomposition were not obstacles to Him who is Himself the Resurrection and the Life, as being the source and having the power of resurrection and of life. "Lazarus sleepeth, and I go that I may awake him out of sleep," said the Lord. How then did He awake a sleeper out of death? In simplicity and in majesty the scene was one of the grandest ever beheld, and yet it was a scene of weeping. A great throng of friends and neighbours stood near to the entrance of the caverned grave, the bereaved sisters wept over the death of their brother, their friends wept in loving sympathy with them, and the great and divine soul of the Lord Himself was so affected with grief, at the sorrows of the bereaved and the desolations of death, that even He wept with them all. One of the two sisters fell at His feet, overcome with distress, and the other, when He said, "Take ye away the stone"—for He would not do that by miracle which could be done without—deprecated the dishonour, and the exposure to their shuddering gaze, of a decomposing body. And yet, to her, the Lord

had just before said, in absolute terms, "Thy brother shall rise again," for He was "Lord of the dead and of the living;" and, accordingly, her brother did almost instantly rise from the dead. As the stone was being removed, some of the weeping group wondered what He was about to do; while He, addressing that trembling woman, said, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Jesus then, with uplifted eyes, said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me; and I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." He then spake to His dead friend, and, that every one near Him might hear and understand, He cried aloud, "Lazarus, come forth." What! and did He speak to the dead? His supreme command, which all by-standers heard, penetrated and moved the organs of the dead body, and entered, and were instantly obeyed, in regions in which no mortal voice was ever heard. Two worlds, the world of death and the spirit world, instantly responded to that command. In the twinkling of an eye, the departed spirit returned from heaven and reinhabited its own perishing but revived body; and, in a moment, the still cold heart began to beat, vital warmth spread over the whole of that cold frame, the current of blood pulsated in every artery and vein, colour reappeared on the marbled face, light beamed through the eyes, sound vibrated in the ears, Lazarus was once more not only a living but a strong and healthy man, and, springing to his feet, he stood up before them all, ransomed from the power of the grave and redeemed from death, with a napkin on his face, a winding-sheet round his body, and his hands and feet bound with the ligaments of the dead. What a spectacle, at that instant, was that risen man, recalled by the Almighty word from the *deep sleep of death!* and, as he stood and heard his

Redeemer say, "Loose him and let him go," what a scene of amazement and delight appeared before him who had just returned to life !

When the Lord said that the dead Lazarus was asleep, and that He would go to Bethany to awake him, the disciples supposed that natural sleep was meant; but when He said that Jairus' daughter slept, He was understood, for He distinctly said that she was not dead—in the Sadducean sense of that word; and because He so said, they mocked and derided Him. The saints who rose from the dead, immediately after Christ, are said to have been asleep; and all that shall rise to everlasting life, and to shame and everlasting contempt, are stated to be now asleep in the dust.—Dan. xii., 2. It is not the soul, but the body, that sleeps in death, the deepest of all slumbers, for the soul is not in the dust. The Gospel is, throughout, a protest against the notion of the soul sleeping after its departure from the body. That notion, were it true, would dispel the transgressor's fear, and darken the believer's hope. The soul does not sleep, it departs; and the desire to depart is not a desire to sleep, but to behold and to participate in the glory of Christ. A large portion of this life is spent in sleep, but not a moment of the life everlasting. The words of Revelation, that death is a sleep, are true only in their true meaning, as denoting the calmness of a departing soul, and the condition of the body in death, and that that condition is temporary, and will be succeeded by resurrection. What was said of Lazarus, of the ruler's daughter, and of the resurrection saints, is said of all that die in the Lord, that they sleep; and the same words have the same meaning. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."—John v., 25. In three instances, in His earthly ministry, and on the morning of

the resurrection, the dead heard His voice and lived. As the above prophecy astonished all that heard it, He added, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth."—John v., 28, 29. That which has been shall be. The fulfilment of the minor prophecy guarantees the fulfilment of the greater. While sleep, therefore, reminds us of death, waking from sleep reminds us of the resurrection from the dead; and thus each night shadows forth the darkness of death, and each dawn speaks of the morning of eternal day.

Sleep does not leave us as it finds us. We sleep from weariness and exhaustion, our strength being spent; but in awaking, after sound sleep, we have lost all sensations of languor and fatigue, our wasted strength is recruited, and we are once more fitted for the action and enjoyment of life. The risen dead might have returned to life as they left it, the vital functions being resumed as they were relinquished, and their bodies, weak as infancy and full of anguish, being just ready to die again; but each one was delivered from disease as well as from death. In each case two miracles were wrought in one, for in each there was restoration to perfect health as well as restoration to life. As it was with these risen ones, so it will be with us. The great facts of resurrection were presented by Revelation to dying humanity that men, in dying, might know, from these pledges of the power and of the will of God, that they shall again live, and that they shall awake from death in a higher condition than that in which they fall asleep. The dead have their deep sleep in corruption, in weakness, and in dishonour, as natural bodies, but they will rise in incorruption, in power, and in glory, as spiritual bodies; and in their properties and powers, the bodies that shall be, will be as superior to the "houses of clay," which we now inhabit, as spiritual and angelic

bodies are superior to the natural and animal. We sleep in the image of the earthy, but shall awake in the image of the heavenly. The mortal will put on immortality. Then shall be fulfilled the great prophecy, in which all others culminate, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Lazarus and others, who were called forth from the realm of death, died a second time, and are now among the dead; but when all that are in the graves come forth, at the word of the Lord, they will never again die; for they will inherit eternal life, and will be, as are the angels of heaven, always growing older, yet, in health, energy, activity, and joy, eternally young.

CHAP. III.

THE DEAD THAT LIVED AGAIN.

SEVEN instances are on record in which the dead that died again were raised. Our Lord raised Lazarus (John xi, 14-44), the daughter of the ruler of Capernaum (Matt. ix, 23, 25), and the son of a widow at Nain (Luke vii., 11, 16); and four others were raised by prayer, viz., the son of the woman of Zarephath, by Elijah (1 Kings xvii., 17, 23), the Shunammite's son by Elisha (2 Kings iv., 33-37), Dorcas by Peter (Acts ix, 36-42), and Eutychus by Paul—Acts xx, 9-12. Each of these persons had really died, and, after a short interval, each one was restored to life and to health.

Now, in each of these instances, the spirit that returned to the body was the identical spirit that left it. Each risen one, after being restored to life, had the same consciousness as in the former life, and in each there were the same recollections as before, the same knowledge of persons and things, and the same habits of life and idiosyncracies of character.

As soon as the young man at Nain, for example, was restored to life, he knew himself again, and knew his own name. His mother, who was standing by the bier, was one of the first objects he beheld, and the moment he saw her he knew her, and remembered that he was fatherless, and that she was a widow. He instantly recognised each acquaintance in the wondering group around him. He knew his own home, and all its familiar objects, and the way he knew. He had the same knowledge as before of his native language, and no sooner did he sit up on the bier than he began to speak; and he spake with the same

facility as before. He was able to recall all the reminiscences of his life; and, in brief, whatever the young man knew before he died, he now knew equally well.

All these things, indeed, must have been known to him, for, had he not known them, his mind would have been perfectly blank, everything in the world would have been strange and absolutely new to him, and he could not have had a single idea of the past, or the slightest self-knowledge. Though he had the body of a man, he would, in that case, have been inexperienced and ignorant as an infant; knowing absolutely nothing, he would have had everything to learn; and incapacity, ignorance, bewilderment, astonishment, and fear would have unfitted him for the work of life. In that case, too, he could not have known his own mother, when the Lord delivered him to her, and still less could he have loved her, as the fond guardian and guide of his life. But, as matter of fact, it is certain that he had—for of necessity he must have had—the identical consciousness, recollections, ideas, knowledge, moral instincts, habits, and character, after his resurrection, that he had before he died.

Could this young man's spirit, then, when he died, have perished like that of a beast? One of two things is certain. When he returned to life he either had the self-same spirit that he had before he died, or he had another spirit. But if he had a second and newly-created spirit, all his memories, all his mental and moral wealth, and all the properties and characteristics of his spirit must also have been absolutely new creations in him. But these supposed memories of a second spirit could not have been memories—that spirit not having been previously in existence; any memories, as such, could have been only in that former spirit which materialism supposes to have perished in death. No one can have recollections of days in which he did not exist. Nor could any unspoken and

unwritten memories of a perished spirit be transmitted to or inherited by another. If, when the young man rose from the dead, he had not the same spirit as he had before he died, two distinct spirits must, in his two earthly lives, have inhabited his body, in succession; and, if there was an identical memory in the two, there must also have been an identical consciousness; consciousness being inseparable from memory. All this, however, supposes mental powers to have been existent and non-existent at the same time. But such an hypothesis is plainly a contradiction, and contradictions are absurd. It is clear, therefore, that, when the young man was raised to a second earthly life, he had not a second and newly-created spirit, and, consequently, it must be as certain that he had the same spirit before his death and after his resurrection, as it is that he had the same body.

What was thus matter of fact in this case of resurrection, must have been equally matter of fact in the others; and that it was so is explicitly shown in two of the narratives. Thus, when Elijah prayed for the resurrection of the son of the woman of Zarephath, he did not ask that a soul might come into the boy's body, but that the boy's own soul might return, for he said, "I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child"—the same soul—"came into him again, and he revived."—1 Kings xvii., 21, 22. And when the daughter of Jairus was raised, it is said that "her spirit came again."—Luke viii., 55. Her spirit had departed, and now returned; the spirit that returned being the very same that departed; and the fact of personal identity must have been established by the clear consciousness and memories of each of the raised ones.

The return of a human spirit to the body, after death, though a great *enigma*, is not a greater than that of its

departure from the body ; nor is there greater mystery in the departure or in the return of the soul, than in the original union of soul and body ; or than there is in the action of the spirit on the brain, and other organs of the body, while we live. These "secret things belong to the Lord our God." The mysteries of our own nature are too profound to be solved. We can deal only with known facts ; and facts in nature and in revelation are equally inexplicable. The fact that the young man's spirit was, after his resurrection, identical with his spirit before his death, is a demonstration of another fact, namely, that, during the interval between death and resurrection, that spirit did not cease to live. The interval, indeed, was brief, but in this matter brevity of time is nothing ; for if a disembodied soul existed, as such, for one hour or one minute, there is no reason why it should not continue to exist in a disembodied condition for millions of years ; or why, were God not to reunite it with the body, it should not thus live for ever.

Now, what was true of this man of Nain, must be equally true of all men ; for, in all men, the conditions of nature and of death are the same. At the time when his body was dead, while his mother was weeping over it, and when that body was being borne to the grave, his spirit, with all its mental and moral powers, lived, and it would have continued to live had his body perished ; and therefore that spirit lives now. His inward man did not inhabit his outward man during the period of death ; yet when "at home in the body," and also when "absent from the body," that inward man was "a living soul." Were any of our dead to be raised, they also, upon their return to the body, would, like the widow's son, know all and be all that they knew and were before they left it. They are now disembodied, as he then was, and as he now is, and yet, like him, they are still alive. And we also, when

our fondly-cherished bodies die, when disease has reduced them to the condition of wrecks, and our surviving friends coffin them and bury them, and when their constituent elements are so completely dissolved that not an atom is discoverable, or could be recognised if discovered, shall even then live as consciously as we live now.

Did any one of the seven that were recalled to earth make any revelations of the spirit world to mortals? On this point the Bible is silent. It is more than probable that such revelations were not made, and that no risen man could make them. Were any dead man to be now raised to life, groups of eager questioners would surround him, to elicit his discoveries and experiences while absent from the body; and, when Lazarus arose, the Sadducees, as unbelievers in a world of angels and spirits (Acts xxiii., 8), may have defiantly challenged him, to say what he had seen or known; while the Pharisees would hope for some disclosures to refute Sadducean materialism. We are not sure, indeed, that Lazarus was not questioned, though no record to that effect has been transmitted to us. Had revelations of the intermediate state been made by one that had risen from the dead, they would have been received with wondering awe, their influence would have been felt by all generations, and authentic records of them would certainly have been extant in our own time, and have been valued, in common with the revelations of God, as the most precious of all treasures; for documents of infinitely less moment have been preserved. But from the silence of all history, and of the Bible, we must infer that, as matter of fact, no such revelations of the unseen world were made.

Revelations of heaven by the risen dead, even had vivid memories of heaven been retained, would probably be impossible. As no child could understand Newton's *Principia*, and as no savage could understand, or, if he

understood, could describe in the rude vernacular of his tribe, any of the marvels of the electric telegraph, or the steam engine, or photography, or even of the jacquard, or any of the abstruse sciences of our time, so neither could the tongue of angels be understood by us or even be intelligibly spoken. Only earthly ideas can be expressed in the languages of earth; so that revelations of the angel world, such as we desire, could not be made in a language intelligible to men. The tongue of angels was declared, by the only man that ever heard it, to be unspeakable. The scenes of heaven are as indescribable as the language of heaven is unutterable; so that had all the visions of heavenly glory been present in the imagination of Lazarus, he must have been dumb before his questioners, from absolute inability to convey to their minds any adequate idea of the memories in his own; there not being any adaptation to the sublime things of heaven in the vocabularies of men.

But it may be doubted whether, upon their return to the earth and to their bodies, the risen ones had any memories whatever of the heaven which, during their absence, had been opened to them. Such memories would have unfitted them for earthly avocations. How could a man see to work in the deep gloom of a crypt, whose eyes were still dazzled by the glory of the sun? He would be impatient to return to the splendours he had left behind. There is no reason to suppose that the risen remembered what they had known; indeed there is reason to believe that they did not; and the analogy between sleep and death suggests that reason. When the brain is asleep, and all communication with the outer world is suspended, the force of the imagination is not spent, for the human spirit would appear to be almost incessantly active, even in sleep; dreams consisting of varied and *fantastic* combinations of waking ideas. The elementary

ideas of all the scenery and dramas of dreamland are derived from those of wakeful life. Some of them, indeed, are vividly remembered, and some linger, in indistinct and broken forms, in the memory; but others, though the emotional effects remain after we awake, are so completely forgotten that we are wholly unable to recall them. The memories of this life are retained in the next, as those of our active hours are retained in sleep. Were there no memory in the world of spirits, there could be no retributions or rewards; a man could not know even himself; indeed, to himself he would not be himself; for total loss of memory would be annihilation to the past. As the happiness or misery of a man in age is largely determined by the memories of his youthful life, so our emotions in our future life will be determined by the memories of the present. Thus Abraham appealed to the rich man's memory, when he said, "Son, remember!"—Luke xvi, 25. But when a departed spirit returned to the body, and resumed its mysterious union with the brain, no recollections of the disembodied life were retained; all were effaced, like forgotten dreams. For the action and power of memory, in relation to that abnormal life, would be suspended, until the spirit should return to the disembodied condition, when the full power of memory would be resumed, and all recollections of the first and temporary residence in heaven would return. Thus the period of absence from the body would appear, upon returning to the body, to be a blank, a time of suspended consciousness; though it was not so. This complete obliviousness of the brief life in heaven was a wise, merciful, and necessary ordination, in relation to life on earth; for, as archangels would find this to be an uncongenial world, and would have no natural or moral affinities for an earthly life, so a saint of God, returned from the presence of God, with recollection of all its splendours, would

be morally incapable of acting as becomes an inhabitant of a world like this.

But the disembodied state of the human soul, however long it may continue, is an unnatural and exceptional state, and will not always continue. When the Lord shall return to the earth, He "will bring with Him" all who shall then be with Him, and their natural condition, as embodied spirits, will be resumed.—1 Thess. iv., 14. Will the memories of the intermediate state be then also obliterated from the mind? will reunion with the glorified body efface or suspend them, like reunion with a mortal body? or would those memories unfit a re-embodied spirit for a second life on earth? By no means. Every such spirit will then dwell in a glorified body, and will dwell on the earth, which also will be glorified; and the conditions of the second life on earth will be altogether superior to, as they will be unlike, those of the present life. The organs of "that body that shall be," when recalled from the deep humiliations of the "vile body," and invested with power and with glory, will only enhance the action and enjoyment of the soul, for it will be made like the human temple of the Son of God; and both spirit and body will be so glorified that the invigorated memory will be able to recall any of the scenes in the long panorama of life on earth and life in heaven.

But if Lazarus, after his resurrection, had no knowledge of the intermediate state, how could he believe in the existence of that state? Not having brought back to this world any knowledge of another, might he not have become a Sadducee, denying the existence of angels and spirits? He might have said, How can there be a world of angels and departed spirits, or an existence after death? I have been dead, yet I know not of any such existence; and I have been absent from this world, but I did not find myself in any other. You say that there is a heaven,

and I have been behind the veil to see, but saw it not; for of my four days in the condition of death I know nothing.

But Lazarus, after his resurrection, was not an unbeliever in eternal life. This is clear from the fact that he was a believer in Christ, who had declared that He gave eternal life to His disciples, and that they should never perish.—John x., 28. That he was a disciple of Christ is made certain by two facts, namely, first, that the chief priests, knowing that he was a living witness of Christ's divine power, conspired to kill him—for those priests so hated the Lord that they would plot to murder rather than believe in Him (John xii., 10); and, secondly, because his fellowship with Christ continued on the former familiar terms, so that he supped with Him in the house of a neighbour, Simon the leper, at Bethany. The greatest of all miracles had been wrought in the person of Lazarus, so that, he could not, without outraging his reason and his conscience, cease to be a disciple of Christ. Having proclaimed that the gift of eternal life was the heritage of all that believed in Him, and that He Himself was the way to that life, the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, as He Himself expressly declared (John xi., 42), to establish His own authority as a Divine revealer, and the truth of His revelations in reference to God, and man, and heaven. How, then, could he, in whose dead body and departed soul that miracle had been wrought, renounce the Lord who raised him, or deny the truth of His words? Of all inconsistencies and absurdities, the denial of Christ's authority and doctrine by Lazarus, would have been the greatest and most monstrous. His own restoration to a second earthly life was the most convincing and palpable of all possible demonstrations that Christ was the Son of God, and that His revelation of the doctrine of eternal life was true.

Lazarus had the strongest evidence, in his own clear consciousness of his personal identity, that during the four days of his absence from the body, he had not ceased to exist. Supposing even that that interval were a blank in his memory, had there not been as many thousands of such blanks, in his lifetime, as there had been nights of sound sleep? Yet, on any morning, as he awoke, did he ever doubt whether or not he was then the self-same being as on the previous day? or whether his spirit had continued to exist during the unconsciousness of sleep, even though no power of memory could retrace the time? When Lazarus rose to his feet, in his caverned grave, he had the same immutable consciousness of his own personal identity, that he ever had, when rising from his bed, after nightly sleep; and his spirit was no more extinct in death than it ever had been in deep sleep, the image of death. His brief residence in heaven, though actually real, was then, to his imagination, like a forgotten dream. The absence of all memories of heaven was to be accounted for by the difference between the embodied and disembodied conditions of his spirit. But when, after he had died a second time, he re-entered heaven, his spirit would return to the same conditions of life as upon his first visit to that world; and, doubtless, he then knew, as all the sublime glories once more opened before him, that he had formerly known them, and had dwelt amidst them all.

CHAP. IV.

TWO HUMAN APPARITIONS WITH CHRIST.

THE return of Moses and Elijah from heaven, after being there some hundreds of years, and their re-appearance, in daylight, and in audible conversation with the Son of God, form one of the most memorable of all historical scenes.

The occasion was unexampled. The Lord Jesus, while praying on the top of a hill, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, revealed His glory; and they, who afterwards witnessed His agony and His crucifixion, "beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father."—John i., 14. As He "went about doing good," He appeared like an ordinary man, and the world despised and rejected so unpretentious a claimant of the highest office, as a blasphemer of Himself. But "on the holy mount" His face shone like the sun, and His very dress, the dress of a peasant, appeared as a garment of light. "In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and now, as though the opaque body had become transparent, the fulness of Divinity within was revealed in overwhelming splendours in the humanity without. When Moses had stood before the glory of God, his own face, the face of a sinful man, was covered with splendour, so that when he returned from his interview with the Lord, men could not look on him until he was veiled.—Ex. xxxiv., 33-35. That radiance was from Another; but the glory of Christ, which transcended that of any angel, was in Himself. The transfiguration, though commonly regarded as the most wonderful event in His life, was really the least wonderful of all; for it was far more wonderful that

He should be "found in fashion as a man," being "in the likeness of sinful flesh," and should live in that state of self-humiliation which began in a manger and ended in a tomb!

While the three disciples of Christ "were eye-witnesses of His Majesty," two human inhabitants of heaven appeared unto them, and these beheld Christ on earth even as they now behold Him in heaven. Though angels had occasionally appeared to men, no man had ever returned from heaven. Indeed, the darkness of death is so great that had every human spirit perished, like those of all the brutes, it could not have been greater. The absence of all human visitors from *hades* led men to imagine that it was impossible for any that had departed this life to return; for history does not tell of any that came back, to make revelations of the unseen world, or to allay the anguish of survivors, or on errands like those of the angels of heaven. Even one undoubted instance, of a disembodied spirit having appeared, might have satisfied the intense cravings of doubting hearts for visible evidence and definite ideas of the future state; but not until the time of Christ were the long-desired apparitions beheld. The two most distinguished of all prophets then re-appeared, in conference with the most august Inhabitant of earth. One was an embodied man, who had not died; the other was disembodied; for his dead body had not been raised, seeing that Christ was "the first-born from the dead" (Col. i., 18), the first that rose to live for ever. They came not, however, to satisfy the curiosity or to aid the faith of men, these being not the objects but the incidents of their appearance; for they came to speak with Christ on "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."—Luke ix., 31. And, while the interview continued, they were, like the Lord Himself, distinctly visible to three eye-witnesses; to whom, however, though very near, they addressed not a word.

Elijah had an opaque and palpable form. He had lived on the earth in an age of general apostacy ; but he rebuked the kings of his country ; and by prayer he called down fire from a cloudless sky, to show that Baal was a non-entity, and that Jehovah alone was God ; and by prayer he divided the Jordan, that he might pass over it, and also raised a dead boy to life. When fleeing for his life, food was brought to him by ravens at one place, and by an angel at another ; and even God Himself spake to him on Mount Horeb. Finally the prophet ascended to heaven, in a vehicle of fire, as though burning seraphim had escorted him away. Thus Elijah knew not what it was to die. And now, at the time of his re-appearance, he had been, for upwards of nine hundred years, an inhabitant of heaven. In being glorified, his body had been "changed," as the bodies of the living will be at the coming of our Lord. He had worshipped with the heavenly hierarchy ; but no angel could unite with him when he "sang the new song." Elijah had dwelt in the very presence of the glory of God. Let us, then, in imagination, look on this most wonderful of men. Where is the world in which he has dwelt, since he departed from the earth in his chariot of fire ? With what glorious ones have those lips conversed ! to what sublime anthems have those ears listened ! and what angelic glories, what scenes of inconceivable magnificence, and what multitudes of the glorified spirits of mankind, which left their vile bodies to perish on the earth, have those favoured eyes beheld ! How distant from our world, and how near to the throne of the Infinite and Eternal One, this man has been ! O Elijah, thou man of God, thou glorified inhabitant of heaven, would that we now were where thou hast been, and whither, after this brief conference with the Saviour, thou art about to return ! For a short time the prophet has withdrawn from the

palaces of heaven, and has descended to his native earth, and now he stands near to Jesus.

Elijah has not come from heaven alone. Only one other glorified man has "passed into the heavens," without tasting death, and in heaven he remains. But a human spirit accompanies Elijah on his sublime errand, and now appears before Christ and the three disciples. Here then is the apparition of a disembodied man, not appearing and vanishing in a moment, like a meteor in darkness, but continuing to be visible in the open day and in the open air, before three spectators, "men of like passions with ourselves." Fourteen hundred and fifty years have passed since Moses, with eyes undimmed and with undiminished strength in all his limbs and organs, at the age of six-score years, ascended Mount Nebo, in the land of Moab, to die. He died alone. No one closed his eyes in death, or wept over his remains; and God gave to him an unknown grave. How familiar with all heaven, and with the inhabitants of heaven, must Moses be, after being there so long! Though now, on his re-appearance on earth, he is not in the body, like his companion, he is visible to mortal eyes, and is heard to speak to the Saviour. The two men appear in glory, for they have become as visible on earth as they are in heaven.

Why should Moses and Elijah be selected to come forth from heaven on this occasion? Adam, as the father of all men, might have fitly represented all; or Abel might have attended, as the first of human immigrants in heaven; or Abraham, the father of believers, and the friend of God, or David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel," or Isaiah, whose prophecies of Christ are like histories, might have represented the glorified in heaven. But Moses and Elijah came, like a deputation from all the hosts of the redeemed, to speak with the Lord Jesus on His death;

and there was great fitness in the selection. Had they represented glorified men only, others might have been as eligible for their mission as they; but they represented "the law and the prophets." All the sacrifices for sin, and the long line of the hereditary priesthood appeared representatively in the person of Moses; whilst, in the person of Elijah, appeared all the prophecies, and the long succession of teaching and writing prophets. For Moses was the founder of the ritual, sacerdotal, and moral law, and Elijah, though he left no writings to the Church, ranked as a prince among prophets, and was the only one of those great witnesses for God who had been bodily translated to heaven. Moses now shows the ark of the covenant, with its two tables of the law, its mercy seat, its atoning blood, its cherubim, and its cloud of glory; and Elijah bears the oracle of testimony, to show that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."—Rev. xix., 10. In Christ every ritual symbol finds its correspondence, and each evangelical prediction its fulfilment. After being in heaven almost ever since the ritual law was founded, and that law being now about to be superseded, as are star-lights by the sun, Moses surrenders the authority of his dispensation into the Saviour's hands, and finds, in His person and propitiation, a key to each ritual enigma, and a solution of each problem in the symbols and services of the priesthood and the temple; and Elijah descends to show, by his presence, and by his reference to the death of Christ, that all prophecy was subservient to the cross. The law and the prophets, through their representatives, now paid homage to Christ, and when He died, they were fulfilled and superseded by his death.

Two ideas filled the minds of the disciples, namely, the Lord's lowly condition, and the worldly grandeurs of his expected reign. Any thought of His death the disciples

repelled; as the idea of despair; and yet His death was to be the one great central fact in the history of the human race. No other event ever did or ever can operate so powerfully on the character and history of nations. Faith in His death, as the atonement for sin, is at this hour more powerful, in millions of human hearts, than the love of life, and is the all-powerful antidote to the love of sin, and to the fear of death; and that faith is now regenerating the world.

The death of Christ is of such infinite moment that it was denoted in the first promise of mercy to men, was the subject of divine prophecies, and was depicted in every burnt offering for sin. All time anticipated it; all eternity will remember it. And yet the great fact, fully set forth and distinctly foretold, that the Messiah's life should be made "an offering for sin" (Is. liii., 10), was, with strange fatuity, overlooked by the whole Jewish people. Visions of worldly glory enchanted their worldly imagination. Their Saviour was to be sovereign of the earth, and to be greater than Cæsar—as indeed Jesus was, in a far higher sense than they ever imagined—with Jerusalem as the metropolis, and themselves as the aristocracy, of the world. The sublimest of all ideas was forgotten; and yet that was the pervading idea in the law and in the prophets. So wholly false was the popular conception of the Christ, that the enemies of Jesus expected His religion to be buried in his grave. They crucified Him because they hated Him, and then they hated Him the more because they had crucified Him. His cross was as odious to them as is the gallows to us; so that the Rock of Salvation was to them a Rock of Offence, on which—instead of founding thereon their eternal hope—they stumbled and fell. But all heaven was full of the one idea that was rejected and lost on earth; and the two glorified saints, during their reappearance on earth, spake only of His death.

While the sublime conference was being held, men were intent only on earthly objects. The vinedresser pruned his vines, the farmer tilled the soil, the fisherman tended his net, the smith toiled at the anvil and the carpenter at his bench, the merchant was intent only on traffic, Pharisees prayed at street corners, to be seen both ways, and priests ministered at the altar. How little did worldly men imagine that the two most distinguished of glorified men were, at that hour, revisiting the earth, and conversing with Him whom the world disdained, on that great event by which the Divine pardon of sin was made consistent with the law that denounced it!

The departure of Moses and Elijah from heaven, to speak with the King of Glory on earth, would not, in heaven, be an unknown or unregarded event. Every glorified human spirit would be acquainted with their mission. Jesus, knowing that they were at hand, ascended the hill that He might honour them with an interview, apart from the world. The disciples, had they conversed with them, might naturally have inquired about the angel world, but all the conversation was on the hour for which Christ came into the world (John xii, 27), to which every altar had pointed, and by which eternal life is given consistently with the high sanctions of eternal law. Even angels desire to look into "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet. i, 11, 12); with what deeper interest, then, must men in heaven regard those vicarious sufferings by which they were saved, and that endless glory of which they were partakers!

Since Moses and Elijah first left this world, books had been written which all generations will read; Grecian philosophy had flourished; dynasties had been founded and overturned; empires had fallen; and imperial Rome had conquered all known nations, and was now supreme over all; yet no reference to any of these things was

made by the Lord, or by His attendants from heaven. Could the revolting scene of Calvary have been first beheld, by one that saw the transfiguration, he could not have supposed that there was any connection between the two events, yet one had such special reference to the other, that the three glorified ones spake of nothing but the sacrifice of the cross. While doing honour to the Saviour, Moses and Elijah spake of His being assailed by the furies of malice and scorn; while transfigured between them, the saints of heaven, they spake of His being crucified between thieves; while His face was dazzling as the sun, of its being contemptuously spitted on; while His head was crowned with Divine glory, of its being crowned with thorns; and of His garments, now white and glistening as snow, being parted among the four crucifiers. But two such men, in conversing with the Lord on His death, would speak of something more than its mere incidents; for they would speak of its legal relations to His government, of its moral influence in the transformation of nations, and of its grand results, in the salvation of souls, in the resurrection of the dead, in the triumphs of eternity, and in the glory of God. All this was represented, not only in what they said, but in what they themselves were, for they appeared to Him in glory, the glory to be earned for them by His cross and His shame. All glorified human spirits were represented by Moses; and all who shall be raised from the dead, in power and glory, by Elijah. Thus the two conditions of glorified humanity appeared before the Man Christ Jesus; and, at the same time, His own body was transfigured, so that in Himself and in them He had an earnest of the magnificent results of His suffering of the cross and the shame; and, for the joy thus set before Him, the cross was endured and the shame despised.—Heb. xii., 2.

While one group of three conversed on the death of

Christ, and another group of three were silent and awe-struck witnesses of the scene, a cloud covered them all. That cloud was not one of vapour. Peter describes it as the magnificent glory.—2 Peter i, 17. The disciples were not terrified at the sight of human forms of life in glory; but the cloud filled them with fear, for, probably, it was the re-appearance of the ancient symbol of the presence of God. But though overcome with awe, they were highly favoured; for, in their presence, the Deity shone forth through the chrysalis of the Redeemer's body; two conditions of humanity were visible, in two forms of glory, whose voices were heard, and whose words were understood; and, now, the Shekinah, like a cloud, covered them. While all the heavenly and earthly ones were silent, and the disciples were prostrate and trembling on the ground, another voice spake, in articulate words, to the men from heaven and the men of earth, the representatives of two dispensations and of two worlds—the church above and the church below. The unbelieving Jews had inquired of the Lord, in wonder, "Who art Thou? what sayest Thou of Thyself?" And now the answer was given, by Him who sent Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him." He who dwells as a Man with men, whom religionists expel from the synagogue, whom Pharisees and priests deride, whom Judas will betray, whom Herod and his men of war will set at nought, whom Pilate will condemn to death, whom men will scourge, and execrate, and crucify, on whose soul shall be laid the aggregate of the sins of the world, and who in dying will "taste death for every man," He "is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Hear Him! Let all the oracles be silent before Him. Let every lip be sealed, in mute attention, in His presence. Let human philosophy sit as a pupil at His feet. Let angels "stand hearkening to the voice of His

word." Legions of angels would descend at His command.—Matt. xxvi., 53. He is the only lawgiver to the human conscience. His words of love shall heal broken hearts. All the dead shall come forth from their graves at His call, and the sea shall give up its dead. And, at the last day, by His supreme arbitrament, men will be eternally blessed and eternally condemned. When the cloud of glory had vanished, the two holy men from heaven had also disappeared, so that the disciples saw Jesus only, and by Him they were charged not to make known the scene they had witnessed until after His resurrection from the dead.

No previous glimpse of heavenly beings equalled this. Here was a human spirit, a representation of all other such spirits, as they are in heaven. Here also was a man in the body who, possibly, was a representation of what all human bodies will be, which shall have part in the first resurrection from the dead. The glory in which both appear is a representation of the condition in which the glorified live in heaven; so that from what they were, when they were visible to men, we may infer what glorified spirits are and what glorified bodies shall be. Here was the Mediatorial King of heaven, as He now is in heaven; for He appeared to Peter, James, and John as John afterwards beheld Him in the visions of heaven itself. Here was an instance of communion, between the Redeemer and two of the redeemed, in their glory, on the means of their redemption, after they had long been glorified. Here was the bright symbol of the Divine presence, covering and surrounding all the group. And here was heard the voice of God, the Eternal Father, declaring Christ to be His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased, and commanding men to listen to Him. The glorified human spirit, the glorified human body, the incarnate Son of God, the Shekinah, the audible voice of

the Infinite One, and the earthly witnesses of the scene; all these presented an epitome of heaven, and this scene had special reference to the great atonement for sin.

The apparition of Moses, a living and disembodied spirit, shows that there is a world of such spirits; for as his soul did not sleep nor die, neither do others, that die in the Lord, die or sleep, as spirits. When Moses was in the angel world, he would be clearly conscious where and in what conditions of life he was; when with Christ and Elijah, he would know that he was on earth; all that was being then said and done he would know, and he would know when he was coming from and returning to heaven. His consciousness had not ceased from the time of his departure from the body; and, being conscious, he would have all the attributes of human consciousness; in other words, all the faculties of the human soul. Bodily instincts perished with his body, and his domestic affections, though not obliterated from his spiritual nature, would be modified in character. As a spirit, Moses was no longer in such communication with embodied men as they are with each other; but, as other departed spirits would be in the same condition as himself, there would be intercommunication between them and him. We know not how departed spirits hold mutual intercourse; but neither do we know how animals, birds, and even ants, which utter no intelligible sound, communicate to each other a knowledge of facts, and act in concert, as they sometimes do, for common ends, as though they were endowed with powers of intelligible speech. A capacity thus given to the lower orders of creation cannot be denied to the higher; for the angelic spirit must be at least equal to the animal. If, therefore, any doubt as to the mutual intercourse of heavenly spirits could be justified by ignorance, ignorance would equally justify a disbelief of many common and well-known facts in natural history.

Moses, though a spirit, had a local presence. When on the hill with Christ and Elijah, he was there only; they recognised his presence, as did the disciples also; and there was conversation, in which he took part, and which the disciples heard and understood. We are unable to imagine how a spirit can have powers equivalent to those by which we speak and hear, for we are as ignorant of spiritual modes of intercommunication as are young children of the means by which the opposite sides of a great ocean are in full and almost instantaneous communication. Supernatural capacities must have been given to the eyes and ears of the disciples, by which they saw and heard Moses, as they might see and hear an angel; and thus they knew that, though dead, he was as truly living, and as really present on the hill-top, as they themselves were.

The appearance of Elijah, like that of Moses, is suggestive of ideas which fill us with the spirit of wondering childhood. All the organs of the body have relation to the sustentation of bodily life; but will they have similar functions in the glorified and imperishable body? Literally do we now "die daily;" for all animal bodies, by respiration, continually burn away their own substance, thus causing both heat and hunger; and, until the vital forces are spent, such bodies are continually replenished and renewed, by the action of the digestive organs. But glorified human bodies, like that of Elijah, are not dissolving bodies; and as they are not subject to chronic dissolution, they cannot experience the cravings of hunger or thirst. The Lord Jesus partook of food after His resurrection; and destroying angels accepted hospitality from Abraham. If the organs of a glorified body retain their wonted functions, it will not be from any necessities of their higher life, but to enhance the enjoyment of life. The glorified will not marry.—Matt. xxii., 30. Births and deaths, among them, will be equally unknown. No mortal

will ever be able fully to understand the meaning of the words, "we shall be changed;" for how, and into what, we shall be changed, can be known only after the event. The great change was complete in the person of Elijah, and it was effected in his case, when caught up from the earth, as it will be in ours, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."—1 Cor. xv., 51, 52. He has lived, since his translation, amidst conditions wholly unlike and superior to those of this life; and, having twice ascended to heaven, he has thrice passed through all the regions between heaven and earth. When he came down, no momentum, like that of a falling body, was acquired; for he alighted gently, with footsteps as soft as those of angels; and when he had to ascend, no "law," like that which binds all earthly things to earth, retarded his ascent. He passed through space where was no air to be inhaled; and he proceeded towards heaven, until the earth's dayside was visible only like that of a distant planet, and until even solar light became a twinkling star-ray. Our wondering heart asks, in ignorance, not in unbelief, "how can these things be?" How the Creator first instituted natural laws, and how their original forces are retained, undiminished and unincreased, is known to us as little as the reasons why celestial beings and glorified men are not subject to their action. All natural elements are absolutely enchained by natural laws; but none of those laws enchain Him who ordained them; and Bible facts seem to teach that the inhabitants of heaven are governed by laws other than those which govern material worlds.

The brief visit of Moses and Elijah shows that, before they left heaven, they were acquainted with One at least of the inhabitants of this world, and with facts relating to Him. They knew the direct way to the very spot which He made sacred by His presence; and that He, though *naturally immortal*, because immaculate, would

shortly die ; and that He would die at Jerusalem, they well knew. No other event in the history of mankind was, indeed, so important as the death of the Son of God ; but innumerable events relate, more or less, to the great object of His death, the eternal salvation of men ; and nothing that is thus of infinite moment on earth, can be regarded with indifference in heaven. The profoundest attention and sympathy of the two prophets in glory are, even now, devoted to the great objects of their earthly ministry ; and all other glorified men must, for the same reasons, have the same deep, holy, and loving interest in the moral conflicts of good with evil in this world. Were we to suppose from our ignorance of all that is in heaven, that they know not anything that occurs on earth, we should foolishly estimate the extent of their knowledge of us by that of our ignorance of them.

The wonderful group on the mount of transfiguration were not strangers to each other. Humanity appeared in four several conditions. The disciples were erring, sinful, mortal men. The person of the Lord was "the tabernacle of God among men," incorruptible and glorified. Moses was apart from his body ; for it saw corruption. Elijah was in the body, had never left the body, and in the body he was changed and glorified, as we cannot be until, like our Redeemer from death, we have died and have risen again. All these were mutually acquainted. Not only did the Lord know the two attendants from heaven, but they knew each other, and they conversed with Him and with each other also. The glorified spirit, Moses, knew him who was glorified in the body to be Elijah ; and Elijah knew the glorified spirit to be Moses. The two left heaven together, they came together to the earth, and together they returned. They had dwelt together in heaven upwards of nine hundred years ; and *having*, as sinners saved by grace, an equal interest in the

decease which Christ should accomplish at Jerusalem, they revisited the earth in company, and on the same errand. Each understood equally well all that Jesus said on the great sacrifice for sin, which He was about to offer; and what each said to Him during the memorable interview was well known to the other. Even the three disciples knew the glorified ones by name, and were enabled to recognise each of them when they appeared, though there was no intercommunication between them. The mutual knowledge of Moses and Elijah shows that there must be mutual recognition amongst all other inhabitants of heaven. When Lazarus was borne up into Abraham's bosom there must have been perfect and instantaneous recognition between them. Even Dives knew both, and both knew him; notwithstanding that an impassable gulf was fixed between their two worlds, communications passed between them, and the lost man addressed the two in heaven by name, though it was impossible for an inhabitant of either place to go to the other. When we "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," we shall not mistake them for Peter, James, and John. The angel Gabriel knows Michael, the archangel, and is by him equally well-known. Heaven is not a great masquerade. Its inhabitants know even us, distant as their world is from ours: much more therefore, must they know one another. That knowledge may be intuitive. Ignorance does not belong to the world of light, nor mutual indifference to the world of love. The friendships of the sons of God on earth are renewed, strengthened, exalted, and perpetuated in their life in glory. They who were "companions in tribulation" here, are there the helpers, by sympathy and by participation, in each other's joy. Each one must have his own name, seeing that their "names are written in heaven," in "the book of life;" and each has his own individual identity, and personal characteristics. So great is the variety in the

creations of God, in this world, that no two human faces ever were or ever will be exactly alike, for every child, and every other creature, brings his own new pattern into the world. The variety in heaven must exceed that of earth, as heaven is grander than earth. Already our names are mentioned by angels' lips, our characters, our conduct, our relations to God, and our hopes of heaven, are known to angels; and they are familiar with us, as though earth were encircled with heaven; for by spiritual perceptions they know what is in man. Being known to angels, much more shall we be known to each other. What happy reunions, then, are being formed every hour, in the magnificent world, the Father's house, in which our Saviour has prepared a place for us! The spirits of them that die in the Lord leave their dead bodies and dying friends, to be with Christ in His glory, and are conducted by attendant angels to His presence; and thus they exchange an earthly for a heavenly life.

CHAP. V.

THE RESURRECTION SAINTS.

GREAT miracles were wrought by our Lord, when He raised the dead, who, after a second life, died a second time; but still greater miracles were wrought when He raised the dead to live for ever; and this He did, early on the morning of His own resurrection.—Matt. xxvii., 52.

The memorable and unique event had been distinctly foretold by the Saviour, when He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."—John v., 25. In three other instances the dead heard His voice, and thereupon returned to life. In raising the dead, our Lord addressed them, while they were dead, as though, in some sense, they could hear His voice; but that voice was something more than a sound, it was the coincident expression and action of His almighty will; and it was instantly obeyed by living spirits in heaven and by dead bodies on earth. The Saviour did not state how many of the dead should hear His voice, but He did say that they that heard should live. The predicted event was then so near, compared with the universal resurrection, that, in predicting it, He said, in hyperbole, "the hour now is." The resurrection of the saints, immediately after His own, fulfilled that prophecy, and no other event did. Seeing that His hearers were astonished at the announcement, that the dead should hear the voice which they then heard, and should live, He added, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming"—that hour may be still distant, as it then was, yet it comes nearer every hour—"in the

which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth."—John v., 29. Yet His hearers did marvel at that ; and they marvelled still more at the second prophecy than the first. The two prophecies were equally literal, and differed only as to the number of the dead that should rise, and as to the time of their resurrection. The resurrection to eternal life, just then at hand, was the immediate and visible guarantee of the greater resurrection of perished bodies which hereafter shall be. All the dead become so entombed in earthly elements that no man can discover them, but wherever they may be, at His word they "shall come forth."

Many graves were opened by an earthquake, at the instant of the Saviour's death. Earthquakes, by opening the earth, have made graves for thousands of the living, but this earthquake, by opening graves, exposed the bodies of the dead. Those dead ones, however, could not rise to life so long as the all-powerful voice was itself silent in death. As Jesus died, the great empire of death was, by this earthquake, visibly and sensibly shaken ; an enormous natural force being made subservient to a supernatural object ; but, as is distinctly stated, the saints did not rise to life until after the resurrection of the Lord. The perishing remains of their once living bodies lay exposed all through the melancholy sabbath that intervened ; for though no one desired to see them, and though the living always bury their dead out of their sight, yet, all manual labour being held to be unlawful on that day, no man undertook the unwelcome task of reburial. Who that shudderingly looked on those fragments of frail humanity, could have imagined that, on the following morning, they would become forms of life and immortality ? So soon as Christ had risen, they also, at His word, came forth from death, as trophies of His conquest of death, and as living pledges, before earth and heaven, that, in

the persons of all His redeemed, death should be for ever abolished.

No man witnessed the resurrection of these holy men, as no man, not even the guards, witnessed the resurrection of Christ. It was the work of a moment; for miracles, unlike the slow processes of nature, were instantaneous. The resurrection of the saints was not one miracle only; there were as many miracles as there were risen men. But, though many, all those miracles were wrought in a moment, and at the same moment; and thus they were like the resurrection that shall be at the last day.

These saints did not leave their graves to return to them; nor did they return to the society and pursuits of men, for had they done so, some record might have been left to us of their subsequent earthly lives. They became not merely living men but immortal men; for they were raised to "live," not to die. The prediction of their resurrection and the prediction of the general resurrection appear to imply that there would be co-ordinate life in the saints of both; so that we may say of those of the first, as the Lord said of those of the second, "Neither can they die any more."—Luke xx., 36.

No one witnessed the miracle by which the bodies of the saints were raised to live for ever. Their glorified nature could not find any objects of affinity, in a world like this, yet they did not instantly leave it; nor did they instantly retire to earthly solitudes; but they entered the streets of Jerusalem, crowded though they were, owing to the paschal festival, and appeared to many. But they did not appear collectively, as a body. Each one might appear to a few only; the saints, however, were many, and the witnesses were many. Recognition and publicity were the objects of the appearances; and to be recognised it was necessary that the saints should appear to those who had formerly known them, and who knew that they

had died and had been buried ; otherwise it would not have been known that they had been brought back to life. When the numerous witnesses saw them, they would remember and identify them, and would thus know that they must have risen from the dead. The glorified condition of the saints, though not comprehended, would be seen. Verbal revelations of their glorious change would not be necessary ; for their very appearance would be a demonstration, as instantaneous as sight. No intimation is given that they made any revelations to any of the witnesses, or that they even spake to them ; indeed, it may be inferred from the brief narrative that their appearances were silent, and that having showed themselves they did nothing more. But, how startling to mortals would be the reappearance in life, in health, and in glory, of the well-remembered faces and forms of men, who were known to have been dead ! and, while indications of identity were sufficiently obvious, how changed, before mortal eyes, must have been those bodies which came forth from the vile condition of death, to that of a life that should never end !

After the silent apparitions had been seen, they disappeared. Christ also disappeared, after His several interviews with His disciples, on the eventful day of all these resurrections. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were strangely agitated on that day, by the tidings that Jesus had risen, and that brilliant seraphs had appeared at His sepulchre. None but disciples were permitted to see Him, after His resurrection, but miscellaneous witnesses, in various places in the city, saw the risen saints. The saints themselves, indeed, as risen and glorified men, were witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord ; and His resurrection was greatly signalised and honoured by their's.

The bodies of these saints had been as seed sown, buried, and out of sight ; as are now those of all the dead.

The great harvest will be at the end of the world, when the reapers will be angels.—Matt. xiii., 39. Of this harvest, Christ and the saints whom He raised were “the first-fruits.”—1 Cor. xv., 20. The word is not first-fruit, as of one, but “first-fruits,” as of several or many. These first-fruits are a sheaf from the great harvest field of the dead, offered, in the celestial temple, to the Eternal.

In the scenes of heaven which John beheld, sixty years afterwards, and which he described for our instruction and comfort, certain holy worshippers appeared, whose names, indeed, are not given, but who were twenty-four in number, and who are repeatedly designated “elders.” These elders sang an anthem of praise to the Lamb, saying, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood” (Rev. v., 9); and they wore white raiment, and had harps, and crowns, and palms.—Rev. iv., 4; v., 8; vii., 9. Their redemption showed that they had been in the bondage of sin; their white robes had been defiled and been washed; their harps were symbols of joy; and their crowns were symbols of triumph in conflict. God, Himself, though the Supreme, has no crown, nor have angels crowns; but Christ is crowned, and the saints in heaven are crowned; for they have battled with sin, and suffering, and death, and have overcome all. As the elders had been sinners and sufferers, it is certain that they had not always dwelt in heaven, and that they were human beings, like the multitude which no man can number, and “which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” They were now arrayed with symbols of purity, victory, glory, and joy. And yet the elders, as such, are contradistinguished from all other redeemed ones in heaven.

The two narratives, of the resurrection saints on earth and of the twenty-four elders in heaven, are incomplete; the first not having an end, and the second not having a

beginning. They are two fragments of human history. But there are correspondences between them; and, on the assumption that each is the complement of the other, they constitute so complete and harmonious a whole, that we know whither the saints went upon their departure from the earth, and what they now are; and we are able to answer the query, as to the elders, "whence came they?" The narrative begun by Matthew is finished by John. Matthew tells of holy men that rose from the dead, and presented themselves before many witnesses, but of their future he is silent, for he had had no visions of heaven; but John, in his heavenly visions, saw redeemed, living, and glorified men, arrayed in emblems of purity, victory, and joy; and he calls them elders.

The name "elders," given to the twenty-four in heaven, is the chief argument to establish their identity with the resurrection saints; and the exposition of that name may be found in the corresponding name given to our Lord. The designation, "elders," has a significant meaning that was intended to be understood, or the word would not have been used, and the meaning is as obvious as the name "First-born," given to Christ, after His resurrection. He was "the First-born of every creature" (Col. i., 15), because, as explained by the same writer, writing at the same time, He was "the First-born from the dead" (Col. i., 18), or, as in the words of John, "the First-begotten from the dead" (Rev. i., 3); for He was the first that rose to be "alive for evermore." The saints rose immediately after the Lord had risen, and thus, as He was the eldest, they were the elders, and, as such, the superiors, of all who shall rise to everlasting life. They are in the body, like Him, and as embodied men they are unlike the multitude whom no man can number. They are elders from the dead in the very same sense in which the Lord *is* the First-born from the dead, no other sense being

obvious or perhaps conceivable; and, as they themselves said, He, their Priest and King, made them also to be kings and priests unto God.—Rev. v., 10.

Thus, there are not fewer than twenty-seven human beings in heaven—Christ, Enoch, Elijah, and the twenty-four elders—all of whose bodies, having been glorified, ascended from the earth—of whom five-and-twenty had died and risen again. As Christ first rose to live for ever, and as He opened heaven to all true believers, He would be the first of that number to enter heaven; but He did not ascend alone, for, presumably, the four-and-twenty elders of all the resurrection dead were triumphal attendants of the First Begotten from the dead. He ascended as the Conqueror of Death, and they attended Him as the blessed spoils of His conquest. Until they accompany Him upon His return, they will be His witnesses and worshippers in heaven, the monumental pledges of His redeeming power and love, and the patterns, like Him, of what all the saved will be in the body, after their redemption from death. The four-and-twenty elders formerly lived on the earth. Here they sinned against God, here they were cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus, here they suffered and, “through faith and patience,” triumphed over suffering, and here, it is expressly declared, they will hereafter live and reign.—Rev. v., 10. In the meantime, while generations come and go, while nations rise and fall, and while the drama of time hastens on to its closing scene, all these glorified men live amidst the glories of the angel world; and those glories are more inconceivable to us than are the splendours of imperial palaces to any barbarians, whose ideas of architecture are limited to the rude structure of the wigwam.

If the resurrection saints accompanied the Saviour in His ascent to heaven, they would remain, like Him and with Him, forty days on the earth. Where, then, could

they all be? and how were they employed during that time? Their appearance in Jerusalem was on the first of those days only; but the Lord appeared on several occasions. Even His appearances, however, were few, and at the distant intervals of a week. We can scarcely suppose that these long intervals of absence were spent, like the forty days of His fast, in solitude. As Christ had risen and the saints had risen, as His body and their bodies had been raised in power and in glory, and as, probably, they, the elders of the new creation, accompanied Him, the First-born, when He ascended to heaven, He and they would be together on the earth, away from the turbulent haunts of evil and mortal men, in such holy communion as they now enjoy. While the Lord was in the act of ascending, and while the disciples were still steadfastly gazing on the cloud in which He disappeared, "two men, in white apparel," suddenly stood by them, not two angels, but, literally, two men, who declared to them that, as the Lord had departed, He should, in like manner, return. These were glorified and immortal men, of whom we know nothing, and of whom nothing can be inferred beyond this, that they were two of those whom He had raised from the dead, immediately after He Himself had risen, who were part of His attendants in His ascent, and who afterwards appeared to John, in white robes, with crowns, and harps, and palms of triumph, as two of those who are now known in heaven, and who, after the general resurrection, will be always known as the elders of all other risen and glorified men.

CHAP. VI.

TRANSLATION OF ENOCH AND ELIJAH.

It might have been supposed, could we have reasoned beforehand, that though angels might visit men, it would be impossible for living men to ascend to heaven; yet Enoch and Elijah were translated thither, though they did not die. The power by which they were enabled to ascend was greater than that by which descending bodies fall, for it overcame that power. Human eyes would trace the departing form of the patriarch and of the prophet, until each was lost in distant perspective; but how or whither they went we cannot yet know; nor can we know the locality or the conditions of their present life.

The translation of Enoch is described with elliptical conciseness and brevity. "He was not, for God took him."—Gen. v., 24. These words were always understood to teach that Enoch did not die, and that he was removed bodily to heaven; and the statement of Paul (Heb. xi., 5), that "Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him," places the fact beyond all doubt.

No circumstantial narrative of Enoch's departure is given; the record being silent, not only as to the place from which he ascended, the persons with whom he conversed, how he was employed, what parting words he uttered, and whether or not he foreknew the event, but also as to who saw him rise, and how he was taken away. The great fact, however, is affirmed, that, in the seventh generation from Adam, he, a living man, was translated to heaven.

The life of Enoch was so pure, his spirit was so loving

and heavenly, and his devotion to God was so deep and unceasing, that he is said to have "walked with God." These words denote holy and constant communion. His very breath was prayer and praise, and, as though estranged from all sin, "he pleased God," who testified to him that he did so. Enoch shone like a lamp in a dark night. His unique translation, which was his reward, had also a public signification. It was an attestation that, in predicting the descent of the Lord with ten thousand of His saints (Jude 14), he spake as a divine prophet; it was also a testimony to the being and government of God, to the fact of human immortality, and to the existence of that higher world to which Enoch departed; and it showed that eternal life was the gift of God. Enoch had seen others die, and, probably, had wept over the dead; and had he continued on the earth, age would have left its usual marks on his person, and he would have inherited death; but, when translated, he ceased to be mortal; and, as "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv., 5), he must have been "changed," as Paul shows that, at the resurrection, we all shall be.

Enoch, being "in the body," has fuller visions of heaven than a disembodied spirit can have; and heaven and the glory of God appear far more fully to him than they appeared in the vision of Stephen; for Stephen had only a brief glimpse of heaven. Favoured men have seen one or two angels, Elisha saw a host, but Enoch lives in the very world of angels. Stephen was enraptured even with his distant sight of heaven; with what emotions, then, must the holy patriarch behold the splendours amidst which he lives! and, as the sight of one angel caused Daniel to faint, how glorified must he be who is able calmly to enjoy communion with all, and to whom is given "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" With what interest

too, would all the holy hierarchy of heaven witness the accession to their own glorious society of this human stranger, when he came from a condemned and redeemed world! And with what welcomes of love would he be greeted, partly on his own account, and, chiefly, as the representative of all that shall be glorified, when death is for ever abolished! What a moment, in the history of man, was that when, in Enoch's person, human feet first alighted in heaven! What scenes did human eyes then, for the first time, behold in that sun of suns, in the glories of its inhabitants, and, above all, in the sublimest manifestations of the presence of God! To what angel voices and praises, such as might be audible even to mortals, has Enoch listened since he entered heaven! and what exalted and loving communion with the inhabitants of that world has he enjoyed! Though upwards of five thousand years have passed since then, during which a hundred generations have lived and died, time has not changed the countenance or diminished the strength of Enoch. He never sleeps, is never wearied, will never grow old; nor are there any cycles in heaven by which to reckon age.

Elijah was translated twenty-five centuries after Enoch.—2 Kings ii. As he foreknew the event, it was not a surprise to him. Elisha, and even the "sons of the prophets," the theological students of the time, knew that Elijah was about to be taken bodily to heaven. The great prophet desired to be alone when the heavenly escort should come to transport him away, but Elisha, his colleague, persistently refused to stay behind, and continued with him to the last. Before his departure, the senior prophet paid a farewell visit to the sacred colleges at Bethel and Jericho; and then the two crossed the Jordan, Elijah dividing it by miracle, and proceeded to the place from which he was to be taken up into heaven.

How happy was Elijah, in prospect of immunity from death, and of being conveyed bodily to heaven ! During his lifetime he had seen others dying and dead ; the wrecks of humanity surrounded him on every side, and doubtless he, like us, had felt the bitterness of domestic bereavement ; but he now knew that he himself would be exempt from the doom of death. "Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return," could not now be said to him. With what wondering awe and with what joy would he contemplate his removal from among men, his journey across intermediate space, and his entrance into a new and most magnificent world, the residence of the princes of creation ! Many supernatural events had been wrought at his instance, and many revelations from God had been made to him ; but one of the greatest of those revelations related to his translation, and the greatest miracle in his life was that by which, without having to die, he exchanged life on earth for life in heaven.

The last moments of Elijah in this world were spent with his colleague in the prophetic office ; while fifty sons of the prophets watched from a distance to witness his translation. Just before his departure he asked Elisha what gift he should bestow, in prospect of their separation, thus showing how vain it would be ask for favours after he was gone, and how useless prayers to saints in heaven must be ; and Elisha requested that a double portion of the prophetic spirit might be given to him. But Elijah could not give that spirit, for it was the gift of God ; but he would be enabled to reveal the Divine will as he ascended, and if, as he went up to heaven, when he could no longer speak to him, he dropped his mantle, that, he said, would be a sign to Elisha that God granted his request.

Elisha knew not how his friend would be borne away, until the supernatural vehicle actually appeared. While

the two men were still in loving communion, forms of celestial splendour were rapidly descending; and as they walked at a gentle pace, exchanging their last words on earth, the angels came with lightning-speed. The prophet's departure was visible and sudden. A brilliant and awe-inspiring vision suddenly appeared; angels came very near to Elisha, and lifted Elijah, who was at his side, from earth and bore him towards heaven. A human body might like a human spirit, be caught away by an invisible agency; but Elisha, if not the sons of the prophets also, distinctly beheld the celestial forms. Christ ascended by His own power, as by His own power He rose from the dead, for no heavenly charioteers bore Him away; but Elijah, being purely human, was quiescent in the marvellous translation; and it is described, not as it actually was in itself, but as it appeared in Elisha's brief vision of the scene.

As men supposed that rapid journeys could be accomplished only with chariots and horses, heavenly forces appeared in forms adapted to the human imagination; the image of a chariot and horses of fire represented the brilliant angelic apparitions. These parted the two men, and bore Elijah bodily up into heaven; and the ascent was spiral, as though it had been from the action of a whirlwind. What, then, were this chariot and these horses of fire? The language is that of metaphor; the fiery forms were emblems. Elisha subsequently saw such forms, at Dothan, in greater number, when "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, round about Elisha." "The chariots of God" are distinctly declared to be angels.—Ps. lxxviii., 17. "The angels of the Lord encamp round about them that fear Him." Elisha did not utter any exclamations of surprise at the second vision, as he did at the first, for by that time, possibly, such visions had become familiar to him, so that he

silently witnessed them. At Dothan "the horses and chariots of fire" were in military array; and the same celestial phenomena, in Elijah's translation, must have denoted the presence and ministry of the same class of heavenly beings. Zechariah speaks of red horses as emblems of those "whom the Lord sent to walk to and fro through the earth" (Zech. i., 8—11), and of chariots and horses as representing "the four spirits of the heavens which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth," and which "walk to and fro on the earth."—Zech. vi., 1—7. "He maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire."—Ps. civ., 4.

The translation of Elijah was clearly miraculous. To entangle our imagination in difficulties arising out of natural laws, were to assume that those laws are not subject to Him who instituted them. A denial of miracles must be equivalent to a denial of that Infinite Power that created all things; for the creation of something out of nothing could not have been by law. He that founded law must be above all law, and able, therefore, to set law aside. Natural laws are not, like God, "from everlasting to everlasting;" for nature itself is not. They are fetters with which He has bound all natural elements; but those fetters do not bind Him that made them. Naturally, He knows no law but His own supreme will. Our knowledge of natural laws is simply a knowledge of natural facts; and from facts we know that the inhabitants of heaven are not subject to the laws that govern worlds like this. When Elijah left the earth, his body was a natural body, but when it entered heaven it was a spiritual body; so that when, upwards of nine hundred years subsequently, he reappeared, he "appeared in glory." The change by which he was glorified would be instantaneous, upon entering his chariot of fire; and, so soon as he was thus changed, he ceased to be subject to natural laws. The

attraction of gravitation bound him not to the earth, as it binds us. Atmospheric pressure was no longer necessary to maintain the equilibrium of the vital forces in his body, as it is in ours. To him respiration ceased to be a necessity; and in his person the laws of waste and supply were no longer in action. And, when the Lord returns to raise the dead, all that shall then be alive will experience a similar change; and that change will be complete and instantaneous, as it was in the bodies of Enoch and Elijah.

Elijah does not appear to have spoken, after he left the earth, his intercourse with mortals being at an end; but Elisha addressed him, as he went up, in an exclamation of wonder, at the celestial apparition, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" His eyes followed the ascending form, and the forms of the escort of fire, until they could not be any longer seen; nor does a cloud appear to have obscured his vision, as that of the Eleven was obscured, when Christ ascended. The attention of Elijah might be supposed to have been so absorbed in himself, and in the extraordinary circumstances of his translation, that he would not be able to think of his fellow-labourer in prophecy, whom he left below; but even at that supreme moment, remembering his promise, as he rose, he dropped his mantle, in token that a double portion of the prophetic spirit should be given to Elisha; and the bereaved prophet, well knowing how to interpret that token, caught the mantle as it fell.

Through what wide regions of space did Elijah now pass, with his heavenly attendants, regions of profound stillness and darkness, which only star-rays and angels traverse! How long was he in passing from this planet to the angel world? Where did those feet next alight, which were wont to walk on the earth? What scenes did those eyes behold, which had long been familiar with

the scenery of the lands of the Bible? Would his attendants commune with him, on the way, on the affairs of the world he had left, and on those of the infinitely grander world to which they were conducting him? New and strange emotions would fill Elijah's spirit as he entered heaven. What magnificent forms, what sublime scenery, what holy worship, what loving fellowships, and what ineffable blessedness would be revealed to him there! Great contrasts must exist between the world he left behind and that to which he was taken. Here are polar cold and tropical heat. The night of this world is everywhere equal to its day. It is a world of storms. Wails of mortal suffering are borne on every wind. All history recounts the reign of violence, and nearly every soil has, in all ages, been saturated with the blood of strife. Man's heart, as that of a savage creature, has been cruel to man. The powerful trample on the weak and torment the gentle; injustice is frequently triumphant, and guilt is openly defiant of God. Earth is an empire of sin and death, and is all honey-combed with graves. Such was, and such still is, the world from which Elijah was removed; but who can adequately describe the world to which he was translated? Its blessedness is perfect, and infinite, and eternal. Amidst that blessedness are Enoch and Elijah now; there, too, are all the resurrection saints; and the souls of all that have died in the Lord; and there, very shortly, we also shall be; for we shall put off mortality, and, departing from earth, shall be, as they all are, with the Lord in His glory.

CHAP. VII.

ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

ON or about the 13th of May, A.D. 33, twelve men, in the costume of peasants, departed from Jerusalem, crossed the valley of Jehosaphat, ascended the Mount of Olives, and proceeded towards Bethany. They were men of lowly rank, and yet through their agency the power of God unto salvation was made known to the world. On the feet of one of their number, and in the palms of His hands—through which nails had been recently driven—were open scars, and in His side was a wide gash left by a spear; for He had been dead and buried, and yet, for forty days He had, since then, been alive. And now, He was about to ascend to heaven, from the height near Bethany, and the Eleven would be witnesses of His ascension. Had He ascended in darkness, or when alone, His disappearance might have filled them with perplexity and doubt; but He ascended visibly from amidst the group, as, in sunshine and in the open air, they stood on mountain table-land; and they all saw Him go heavenwards.

The Eleven had been partially prepared by prophecies for this most memorable event. Christ Himself had distinctly told them that they should see Him “ascend up where He was before” (John vi., 62); and after His resurrection, He said to them, by message, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”—John xx., 17. Thus they knew, and they were perplexed by the knowledge, that the Lord was about to leave them, and to depart to heaven. Indeed, the very scene of *His* entrance into heaven had been represented,

in prophetic vision, to Daniel, five hundred and eighty-eight years before (Dan. vii., 13, 14); and nearly five hundred years earlier still, David foretold it, and, to denote its certainty, wrote of it as though it had already come to pass.—Ps. lxxviii., 18.

The Lord did not ascend, like Elijah, in a vehicle of fire; He was not carried, like Lazarus, by angels, nor was He “caught up” as, after our resurrection, we shall be. He ascended by an act of His own will, the attraction of gravitation not having power to hold Him to the earth’s surface, as it holds us—and thus His ministry, which had been crowded with supernatural prodigies of beneficence, ended in His bodily and visible departure to “where He was before.”

Before leaving His disciples, the Lord addressed to them His last precious words of direction and of promise. His hands were stretched forth in the attitude of blessing, and words of benediction and love were on His lips, when, while all eyes were fastened on Him, He, by invisible power, began to rise from amongst them, and rose higher and higher still. As He ascended they looked up on Him with silent awe and wonder, and He, doubtless, continued to look down on them, in condescending love. What divine benignity and sympathy would be in that look, as He left them to fulfil their arduous mission in this unfriendly and stormy world, while He should conduct His sublime work in heaven! His accents gradually died away on their ears, as He departed from them; but, so long as He was visible, His eyes and outstretched hands continued to be over them, in brief and loving farewell, and they ceased not to gaze intently on His revered form, until He was hidden by a cloud.

The simplicity of the Lord’s ascent was equalled by its *grandeur*. It was not a worldly pageant, with “*pomp and circumstance*,” to gratify the curiosity of a concourse

of mere gazers. No legions of angels filled the air with celestial melodies, as when He was born, nor was any visible honour done by them to His ascent. So far as the disciples could see, He ascended alone. The grandeurs of His ascent were not in visible surroundings, but were altogether in the event itself, as a transfer of the scene of His mission from the footstool to the throne of God.

What a transition was this, from the footstool to the throne! and what a contrast between the eleven frail mortals that witnessed His departure from earth, and the hosts of holy immortals that witnessed His advent in heaven! Where did He alight? As He arrived in heaven, what welcomes and what blessings and homage would He receive from glorified men, in the body, and from glorified spirits of men! His great work of teaching, of suffering, and of death was accomplished; He had left an influence behind that should spread, amidst the strifes of centuries, until it permeated the whole world; and he had now come to be Mediatorial King. How unlike the scenes around Him in heaven, were the scenes in which He lived below, such as those in the courts of Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate, and those of Gethsemane and Calvary! and what contrasts between the cavilling and reviling religionists of this world, and the redeemed and the angelic hosts above; and between the derisive, rancorous, and blasphemous clamours before His cross, and the adoring praises before His throne!

The disciples of Christ, while regarding His exaltation to heaven with great joy, felt His departure as a bereavement; and, in prospect of the work of evangelising idolatrous and hostile nations, which He had devolved upon them, and until the descent of the Holy Spirit, an intense feeling of helplessness filled each one's heart. They worshipped the Lord, as He ascended; and, in hope of obtaining another glimpse, however faint, of His

ascending form, their open and upturned eyes were silently and steadfastly fixed on the firmament where they had last seen Him. As they thus gazed, strange voices addressed and startled them. At that solemn moment they were thinking only of Him; and in the stillness and solitude of the scene, no footsteps were heard, nor did anything indicate the approach of strangers, yet two men, clothed in white, suddenly appeared. "Ye men of Gallilee," they said, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."—Acts i., 11. The disciples had not seen the two men in white come up from the valley or descend from heaven; nor did they know them. It is clear, however, that the two had seen the Lord ascend, that they knew whither He was gone, and that they knew what the Eleven, in the overpowering emotions of the moment, had forgotten, that He would return; and they also knew that He would return as He departed, by His own power and in clouds. Until that hour the disciples had been enchanted with cherished illusions of an earthly monarchy, and they had hoped that even then He would inaugurate a visible reign; so that the spectacle of His departure to heaven, which filled them with mingled emotions of wonder and joy, disconcerted and perplexed them; for they were slow of heart to understand that His kingdom was not of this world, and that His supremacy was in the conscience and affections of man. The two strangers were monitors and prophets, and by such a revelation as could have come only from God, they both chided and consoled the disciples. Their dress, in being white, resembled that of the angels and saints in heaven. They had not wings, for they were men; even the wings of angels, indeed, were mere symbols. The visitors were unseen, until they spoke or were about to speak; for they

unexpectedly addressed the disciples. But, when not seen, they had vocal powers, and, possibly, the disciples might have heard them, as the companions of Paul heard the voice of the Lord, though they saw Him not; and as those of Daniel heard that of an angel, whom they could not see. The two men were probably with the ascending Saviour before they appeared, and were in waiting while He was on the earth. Him, indeed, as He rose, the Eleven distinctly saw, but them they saw not. As the two in white were His attendants, others also, like them, would be with Him; but the two returned to instruct and comfort the Eleven, and through them to instruct and comfort us. Angels also accompanied the Redeemer from earth to heaven. This we learn from the joint testimony of the two men and of the Lord; for, while He declared that He will "come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him" (Matt. xxv., 31), they said that He will return as He departed. The words "all His holy angels" show that all heaven will attend to do honour to that grandest epoch in the history of our race; we may infer, therefore, that, by their presence, all the holy angels, though unseen, honoured His ascent from our world to theirs. The disciples, indeed, did not see them as they saw Him; but, what then? Having done honour to His birth, to show that Divine glory was associated with Him, even then, much more would they honour the consummation of His work on earth; so that "a multitude of the heavenly host," and "men in white apparel," would form His triumphal train. As Conqueror of sin and death, He left the scene of His marvellous life, "leading captivity captive;" as High Priest, He passed beyond the veil of the visible heavens; and, as Lord and King of all, He ascended His mediatorial throne, on which He is "higher than the heavens." Even a homeless and friendless beggar, that died in the

open street, was carried to heaven by angels, how much more, then, would legions of angels attend the world's Redeemer and Sovereign, when He ascended to conduct His government on earth from His throne in heaven!

We have not a circumstantial description of our Lord's entrance into heaven, as we have of His departure from earth; for mortal eyes could not see that distant scene within the veil, and angels have not described it, as they described the lowly scene of His birth. But prophecy supplied what history has omitted; so that, from those ancient prophecies which showed how He should enter heaven, we learn how He actually did enter; for there would be an exact correspondence between the prophecies and the event. Thus David said, in special reference to the Lord's ascension, "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even many thousands of angels. The Lord is among them, as on Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, Thou hast received gifts for men, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God—the Holy Spirit—might dwell among them."—Ps. lxxviii., 17, 18. Daniel had the sublime vision prophetically depicted to him, in the sixth century before Christ; and his circumstantial description applies to this event, and does not apply to any other. "Behold, One, like the Son of Man, came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days; and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."—Dan. vii., 13, 14. In these few words we are favoured with a prophetic photograph of the scene of our Lord's entrance into heaven. The Son of God may, in eternal ages, have redeemed other races of fallen beings, and

may again redeem; but, so far as we can know, His return from the scene of His redeeming work on earth, and His entrance into heaven, in an incarnate nature, as the Conqueror of sin and death, and as the Sovereign and Saviour of men, was a unique event, and formed one of the grandest epochs in the annals of even heaven itself. His own "glorious body" there appeared as the great oblation for the sins of the world. The mediatorial throne awaited His arrival. All the marshalled hosts and orders of the celestial hierarchy paid homage to Him. Before His intercession began, and even before He entered heaven, the Eternal Father said to Him, as though to anticipate His prayer, "Ask of me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession."—Ps. ii., 8. Many angels that then witnessed His advent had seen Him in His self-humiliation on the earth. "A multitude of the heavenly host" had seen Him when, as an infant, He lay in a manger, in an outhouse, at a village inn; some angels ministered to Him, after He had fasted forty days; one had strengthened Him in His agony; and two had sat within His tomb. But He now received the joy that had been set before Him, that He might endure the cross and despise the shame; and, with what interest did all those angels behold Him now! and with what ineffable wonder, gratitude, and love, did the glorified men that were in the body, and the glorified spirits of men, regard Him, for each one owed eternal life to Him! He transcended all those glorified men, in glory, as, on the mount of transfiguration, He transcended Moses and Elijah, when, while they "appeared in glory," "His face did shine like the sun."

The Lord's ascension was a necessary link in that great chain of events which began with the promise of Christ to the fallen ones in Eden, and which will result in an

everlasting jubilee. It was necessary to connect its antecedents with its subsequences, to follow all that went before, and to precede all that came after. "For awhile He made himself a little lower than the angels;" but now, having gone forth among a race of rebellious creatures, to make their pardon consistent with holy and immutable law, and, by unexampled love, to win back their hearts, that they might love holiness in loving Him, He returns to His palace, and reascends His throne. "I have glorified Thee on earth," said the Divine Mediator, in a sublime address to His Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."—John xvii., 4, 5.

The Lord Jesus is now as truly alive in heaven as He formerly was on earth; and He is "alive for evermore." His glorified body is, in the highest sense, the Temple of God; and His countenance is now as the sun shining in its strength, His eyes are as flames of fire, His feet are like molten brass, and His garments are as robes of light; so changed is the body of the Lord.—Rev. i., 14-16. We cannot wonder, then, that in the person of John, who, threescore years before, saw Him ascend to heaven, weak humanity swooned before His glorious presence, or that the presence of the Lord should have struck Paul with instant and total blindness.

All power on earth and in heaven is given to Christ (Matt. xxviii., 18), and having, by His death and resurrection, spoiled spiritual principalities and powers, and—like a conqueror in public state—made a show of them openly, triumphing over them (Col. ii., 15), He has received a solemn investiture of His mediatorial crown. All things, visible and invisible, are subject to Him (Col. i., 16), all the angels of God worship Him (Heb. i., 6), and, even on this rebellious earth, every knee shall bow,

and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii., 10); for He must reign until all enemies are put under His feet.—1 Cor. xv., 25.

His power on the earth, though unseen, is unconquerable; and of His reign there will never be an end. The gentle lamb, that endures frightful sufferings and wrongs, vanquishes the ferocious lion. The sovereignty of Christ is supreme in the human conscience, and in the adoring loyalty and love of all hearts that are sanctified by His all-permeating spirit. No love is so deep, so unselfish, so holy, or so enduring as love to Him. It loathes every form of sin, it conquers all human enmities, it despises death, in His service, and is in truth the most vital of all moral forces, a seraphic fire, and an ever-living joy. The kingdoms of this world are geographical territories; His kingdom is within us. All lordship and all assumptions of power among His disciples, all sacerdotalism, and all mere churchism, are repugnant to the spirit and laws of Christ. His servants are "gentle towards all men," their homage is not in genuflexions, but is "in spirit and in truth," and they please Him only by supreme and practical love to Him, and by unfeigned charity to each other, as brethren.

As all things on earth are comprehended in the government of our ascended King, all things are, by His Providence, subordinated to His reign of grace. All true science becomes subsidiary to the science of God, and learning and mechanical inventions minister to the dissemination and triumphs of the Gospel. Even wars are so overruled by the Lord of Glory as to contribute to the overthrow of hindrances to universal peace. Men often act from evil motives, and are as free to act as though Christ did not reign over all or over any, yet He causes even human passions and moral wrongs to subserve the sublime ends of that *moral government* which He conducts in reference

to the evangelisation of our race and the destinies of eternity; and thus the very efforts made to frustrate His purposes directly and frequently contribute to their accomplishment. We can as little comprehend the extent of His rule as we can know all the complicated interests of the human race; for that rule is over all things, as the ocean covers all the cavities in its bed. But vastness does not encumber Him, minuteness cannot escape His attention, nor can numbers overcrowd or varieties perplex Him.

The sovereignty of Christ, being as unlike all human sovereignties as it is superior to all, knows no visible forces, emblems, or pomps. While establishing the bases of His monarchy He Himself was lowly and despised; and in Him men saw one who wore a peasant's dress, with no sword but truth and with no law but love. When "He ascended on high," He left no book of statutes behind, He had written no autobiography to immortalise His name, nor had He constructed any organisation to give effect to His designs. His disciples were a poor, insignificant, uneducated little band; nor, when He departed, did they fully understand His mission or their own. All earthly powers, swayed by the carnal mind that is enmity against God, sought to exterminate both their cause and them. But His spirit is as invincible as it is gentle; and it is the all-pervading law of His kingdom. All nations have proudly and fiercely hectored that spirit; and, as though acting in concert, have nicknamed it, have proscribed it by law, and have attempted to wither it with scorn, to wear it out with anguish, to crush it with authority, and utterly to destroy it with fire and sword. The child of heaven has been stigmatised as the foul offspring of hell; and the human bloodhounds of successive generations, professing to do God service, have hunted it to extirpate it from the earth. But amidst all the forces and furies of

death, that spirit has been an indestructible life; amidst the unceasing mutations of all time, it has been immutable; and there is not now any power that is, in any sense, comparable with His power. Though He Himself is unseen, He is, as He always has been, and always will be, the object of adoring and obedient love. That love is at once a principle and a passion, in which there is the homage of reason, which thrills through every moral sensibility, and which comprises in itself all the germs of the highest moral excellence. His unerring will is, to all that love Him, the supreme and universal law. Every enlightened conscience reverently owns His sway. Millions of martyrs, that never saw Him, so steadfastly loved Him that, rather than deny Him, they encountered all the tortures that the fiends of this world could inflict; and, at this hour, love to Him is stronger, in millions of human hearts, than is the love of life or the fear of death. Moral evil alone rebels against Him. His reign is a divine life in the human soul. Charity, holiness, and blessedness constitute His realm. His dynasty, being in Himself, will endure for ever. To love Him is to become like Him; for love to Christ is the one all-assimilating and all-purifying element in human hearts. No creature ever did or ever could evoke such love as love to Him. That love, as the inspiration of His spirit, gives to men the purity, benignity, and grace of angels, so that the highest type of Christianity is the loveliest and noblest type of man. His reign fills the homes and hearts of men with the harmonies of heaven. All the shadows of our earthly life lie outside the realm of Christ, for it is a region of unceasing sunshine; the highest delight of His servants is to please Him; their whole life is a heavenly psalm; in their very spirit is a heaven of purity and sweetness; and, dying, they live for ever. The divine power of Christianity, in the heart of the true Christian, is the

greatest and most practical of all demonstrations of its truth; but "a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." Nothing like that power exists; for it "is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth" (Rom. i., 16); and "he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself"—1 John v., 10.

When the hour of His departure had come, the disciples of the Lord clung to Him, in spirit, with tenacious love, and would, if possible, have detained Him on the earth; but His bodily absence was necessary, if only that their minds might be emancipated from all ideas of an earthly and ecclesiastical sovereignty, and that His place among them might be taken by the Holy Spirit. He therefore said, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you."—John xvi., 8. They felt, in prospect of His departure, like a group of orphans; but, He said, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you."—John xiv., 16-18. According to these words, the Divine and ever-living presence abides within each true disciple of the Lord. His bodily presence is, indeed, in heaven, but as a Divine being He is present in every place in which His disciples are met together in His name; and, knowing how naturally men like to go in multitudes, and how frequently the assemblies of His disciples would be very small, He, lest they should be discouraged by their own fewness, said, that however small might be the number at any meeting, He Himself would be present with them. "Where two or three are

gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”—Matt. xviii., 20.

Our Lord ascended as our High Priest. He “is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”—Heb. ix., 24. He there presents Himself as the sin offering for all that trust in Him. “Wherefore, He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”—Heb. vii., 25. He entered heaven as our Forerunner (Heb. vi., 20), and thus led the way that we might follow; and now He holds our “purchased possession,” “the inheritance of the saints in light,” in reserve for us; and He will receive us to Himself, that we may be partakers of His glory. We shall partake of that glory partially, while “absent from the body,” and perfectly, at “the redemption of our body.” We, therefore, now set our affections on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God, for our heart is not where we live but where we love; and “our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”—Phil. iii., 20, 21.

СНАР. VIII.

THE OPENED HEAVENS.

IN eight instances, and in relation to six events, are the heavens said to have been opened; but such words as these are not in any book other than the Bible. The visible heaven appears, in perspective, as a stupendous concave over the earth; and the metaphor of heaven being opened represents this apparent dome as cloven or rent, so that regions and objects beyond are revealed. The idea is occasionally suggested by natural phenomena. It is so in a thunder-storm at night, when, while the sky is covered with black clouds, electric explosions give forth flashes of brilliant light. The dark heavens then seem instantaneously to open, dark clouds appear as mountains of splendour, and reverberating thunders succeed the momentary revelation of cloud glory. When a dense morning fog vanishes, the heavens open in the solar splendours of noon. Even night-darkness, in the absence of clouds, opens the heavens to us, and thus discloses the scenery of the universe, and enables us to look forth into the infinite. There is a sublime analogy between these magnificent appearances to the natural eye, and those visions in which, in a supernatural sense, heaven was opened and its glories were revealed.

As the natural heavens are at almost all times more or less open, we are familiar with the sight of distant suns; and, on very clear nights, our vision reaches to immeasurable distances. But we are so blind to spirits, angels, and heaven, that no glasses could enable us to discern them. Our eyes would require to be opened, to look into the opened heavens, and to see spirits and spiritual

bodies; for powers of vision must be correspondent with objects of vision. Only "He that formed the eye" could give to it a supernatural capacity; and that capacity He has occasionally given.

That power was given to Paul, though not to his attendants, when, as he journeyed to Damascus, he saw the Lord Jesus. They, indeed, heard a voice, but not the voice of the Lord; they could not see "His glorious body," though they saw a glory incident to His presence. Paul heard and answered the Lord's voice, which men had been wont to hear during His earthly life; and he so distinctly saw His sacred person, in the opened heavens, that he claimed to be a witness of the fact that Christ was risen from the dead. The sight, being supernatural, was so overwhelming as to blind him, and it superinduced such complete physical prostration that for three days he could neither eat nor drink. His sight was, indeed, restored by the power of God, but he ever afterward retained in his eyes "the marks of the Lord Jesus," a thorn in his flesh, the incident of abundant revelations, to chasten his spirit; so that writing was at all times difficult and painful to him.—Gal. iv., 14, 15; and vi., 11 and 17. Paul then saw the Lord as truly as He was seen, after His resurrection, by the other apostles; and he saw Him in His glory, which, with the exception of John, no other apostle did. As Paul's attendants could not see the Lord, neither could those of Daniel see the angel whom Daniel saw. The former "stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts ix., 7), and they all were so terrified as to fall to the earth (Acts xxvi., 14); and the latter, being conscious of a superhuman presence, which they could not discern, fled in dismay, and sought to hide themselves from they knew not whom or what.—Dan. x., 7. Both Ezekiel and John saw heaven opened. When Ezekiel was first favoured with divine

revelations, it was not by inspiration, for the revelations were made to his bodily organs; he saw apparitions and heard voices from heaven. "The heavens were opened," he says, and "I saw visions of God."—Ezek. i., 1. John also states that he "beheld a door opened in heaven" (Rev. iv., 1), and that he "saw heaven opened."—Rev. xix., 11. These visions were not dreams; they were apparitions beheld by a supernatural capacity. Peter also, when in an ecstasy or trance, at Joppa, saw heaven opened; a vision of symbols appeared to him, and he was audibly addressed by one who was unseen and undeclared.

Heaven was opened over the scene of the Saviour's baptism at the Jordan.—Matt. iii., 16; Mark i., 10; Luke iii., 21. That baptism, simple as was the mode of its administration, was the inauguration of His public ministry. The Deity then, if not before, became incarnate in His person, and that sublime career began, in which the cherished hope of all generations was realised, and which ended in His ascension to heaven. Well might heaven and God give public recognition of such an event in the earthly life of so marvellous a being. No angel, indeed, ministered to Him then, as when He was in His agony, or appeared to others, as at His resurrection; but the Divine presence was manifested. That manifestation was not terrifying, as when the law was given on Sinai, but was in harmony with the gentle spirit of the evangel of Divine love. The Shekinah, which had anciently appeared, and had long been withdrawn, was now once more visible. The presence of the Holy Spirit was indicated, and a voice came forth which said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Heaven was opened, as though it were for men to look within; and the whole scene on the bank of the Jordan was covered with heavenly and Divine splendours, in the presence of which solar light was pale and dim. The vision was

altogether unique, as the occasion was unique; and by that vision Divine grandeurs were visibly associated with that form of humble humanity in which was "God manifest in the flesh."

Stephen was favoured with an insight into heaven, just before he was martyred for Christ. A spirit of frenzy swayed the counsels of the Jewish Sanhedrim, before which he was arraigned; and that supreme judicial court became a concourse of fiery zealots, human tigers, amidst which the holy Stephen was like a lamb. They had been cut to the heart by his bold and faithful address, and, in the vehemence of their passion, being unable to answer him, they gnashed their teeth, as though they would devour him, and charged him with blasphemy. Amidst the utterances of human passion, on every side, not one friendly word reached his ears. Every face in the hall was an image of astonishment and rage; and no loving countenance met his eyes. And yet, a divine serenity pervaded his spirit; he was full of the Holy Ghost; and his face, amidst that terrible scene, was "as it had been the face of an angel." They resolved to kill him, to do God service; but in that service he was undismayed by death, and unmoved even by mortal violence; for, in the immediate prospect of heaven, his faith overcame all fear, and he was full of peace and love.

The greatest crisis of his life had now come; and, what grave questions might, at that moment, have arisen in his heart! For what cause, and in whose service, he might have asked, have I made myself an object of all this public hate, and placed my life in peril? What if death should be destruction, and all men should perish, like insects, reptiles, and brutes? Is there a world of spirits, in which I shall hereafter live? or is my cherished hope an illusion, and heaven a realm of romance? Is there really a world of glory? and, in the event of my being

brutally killed by this mob, with the sanction of these dignitaries of Church and State, do I know of a certainty that I shall be instantly translated to that world? Jesus, in whom I have believed, has disappeared, but I did not see Him ascend into heaven. Is He in heaven now? and can He now deliver me? Would it be better for me to be killed in His service, or to save my life by abjuring both it and Him? What if, after all, it should be for a mere superstition that I encounter all this animosity, and this misery and death! If there be a heaven, let its glory appear to me now; and if Christ really is the King of Glory, and all power in heaven and on earth does belong to Him, as He said, let Him now disclose Himself to me; and, at this mortal juncture, let Him declare His supreme power on my behalf, that I may clearly know what will become of me, whither my departed spirit will go, and what my future condition and experience will be. Stephen might have rapidly revolved such queries as these within himself, as he faced the infuriated court, and confronted impending martyrdom; but his whole conduct showed that not a doubtful thought arose in his heart.

There was a special reason, which had relation to very many others, as well as to himself, why a supernatural revelation should now be made to Stephen. He was the first of all martyrs for Christ. Innumerable disciples of Christ have, since then, been forced to drink "the cup of trembling." The martyred victims of Romanists alone have been, probably, not less than fifty millions. If all that have witnessed for Christ, by death, were to be raised from the dead, they would be, not merely a "noble army of martyrs," but a great empire. Each one was assailed by human furies, like fiends, as though he had been unfit to live; and all were frightfully tortured and destroyed. Were all these faithful sufferers for Christ so many

pitiable fanatics? if so, they were, in truth, "of all men most miserable." Stephen was now to become the first of all Christian martyrs; and if the existence and glories of heaven, and the personal glories of Christ, were to be now made visible to him, all those glories would become as certain to all other Christians as though they themselves had personally seen them. Thus, any revelations of heaven made to him would not be for himself alone, but would also contribute to the assurance and comfort of all who, in departing this life, trust in Christ as the way to life eternal. An actual sight of heaven would be a visible demonstration of the actual reality of heaven; nor would that demonstration need to be repeated to all, or even to any; for he would see heaven representatively, and to every man, in all time, the testimony of Stephen would be as good as that of his own eyes; the evidence of one credible witness, who himself could not be deceived, and who, in view of impending death, would not deceive others, being sufficient for all men.

But if, at this juncture, Stephen was to receive a revelation of heaven and of Christ, it must be instantly made; for the hands of the cruel would shortly seize him; and how could he look steadfastly into heaven while being assailed with brutal violence in the streets, or while being stoned to death? Let him see heaven, and his Saviour in heaven now, while in the court, before the hand of violence shall touch him, and the sight will sustain his faith and solace his heart; and not his only, but those of all others also, whom his witness shall instruct and comfort. And, while the sublime interior is opened before him, and he is looking within, let him instantly and openly declare to the deluded throng what he beholds; and chief priests and Scribes, and Pharisees, and even Sadducees, those unbelievers in angels and in spirits, will hear it. The witness to fact thus borne will also be

written, be reproduced millions of times, and be eagerly read by great nations, in all tongues and in all time, and will thus strengthen the confidence and augment the joy of all generations of dying men. The first great crisis in church history had now come. In the annals of men such an event and such a moment had not previously occurred; and at this moment the most wonderful and most precious sight of the glory of God, and of Jesus at His right hand, was actually vouchsafed.

While Stephen gazed on the frightful scene around him, and the court rang with maledictions, and while his spirit was confident in Christ, and calm as heaven, his attention was drawn upwards. All that were in the council witnessed the fixedness of his gaze; and they beheld a strange and heavenly radiance and rapture kindled on his countenance. As he looked, he was silent. Why were Stephen's eyes fixed immovably upwards, as though he saw objects which others could not see? and why did his countenance assume such an expression as might be supposed to belong only to an angel of heaven? How was his attitude of fixed and rapt attention, at such a moment, to be accounted for? What could he see, where no other man saw anything? Could his mortal eyes look within that veil which we must die to pass, and thus behold the glories of heaven and of God? and, while standing in such a place, and among such men as the carnally-minded religionists around him, could the ascended Saviour, whom those very men, in that very court, had despised and rejected, become visible to him? "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." While he gazes he is led to speak, that the words may be transmitted through all ages to the very end of time; and, what an explanation he utters! Stephen, thou faithful witness for Christ,

what dost thou now see? "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."—Acts vii, 55, 56. What a spectacle was this for a mortal, a saved sinner, to behold! The closed and impenetrable heavens unveiled their splendours, that he might look within; and the glory of God—not God, but the glory of God—was visibly before him. Thus human eyes, which solar glories would have dazzled, and, for the moment, blinded, were enabled to gaze intently on that very different and infinitely more transcendent glory, the glory of the Infinite, Almighty, and Eternal One. Continuing to gaze, as he had never gazed before, he beheld the Lord Jesus, and recognized Him the moment he saw Him. While thus looking within the opened heaven, on the glory of God and on the glorified Son of Man, would he not also see the angels of God, and hosts of redeemed and purified spirits of men before the throne? In seeing the celestial King he would surely see the celestial court. No voices addressed him from above, no sounds of heavenly worship reached him; for the spectacle was one of silent grandeur. A new and spiritual universe was suddenly revealed. Had he been able circumstantially to describe the whole scene that opened before him, the revelation would have deeply gratified all whose hearts yearn after fuller discoveries of heaven; but, while wonderful words were on his lips, a great uproar was raised by all the furies around him, who, in their infatuation, regarded his revelations of the heavenly scene as blasphemous, stopped their ears that they might not hear them repeated, and rushed upon him with one accord, as if to massacre him on the spot.

The holy Stephen was now about to pass through a brief scene of horror; but, from that scene his spirit would pass into the heavens which had opened before him, to dwell before the manifested glory of God, and to be with

Christ in his glory. The existence of heaven, and his immediate entrance into heaven, being certain, and having had a sight of heaven, he joyfully welcomed death, and was ready even to be stoned, that he might die to live for ever. While the murderous crowd assaulted him with stones, he lovingly prayed that their great crime might be forgiven, he committed his spirit to the Saviour, to be received into heaven, and, while they were frantic with rage, he died as calmly in spirit as he had ever been wont to sleep.

Stephen's insight into heaven was not a dream ; for no man could be wider awake than he, while, amidst insane excitement, he was passing through a mock trial for his life. Nor was that an hour for romance, for he had then to encounter the hardest and most frightful facts of life and of death. No hallucinations could, at such a time, and in such a place, beguile a man like Stephen. The excitements around him might have conjured up imaginary horrors in the mind of a weak and nervous man ; but, what a contrast did he witness between the demonstrations of violent rancour in the court, and the serene and sublime vision which opened to him above ! What he distinctly saw he distinctly declared, and he declared it while he saw it. The words were in his mouth while the vision was before his eyes. It was not a memory of that which once was, but an existing and present reality. He made the revelation to no friendly audience ; and in making it he had nothing on earth to hope for, but had everything to fear. It only exasperated his enemies ; they blasphemed in charging him with blasphemy ; and those misguided and infatuated men were filled with wrath and with horror. But, with such a manifestation of heaven, of God, and of the Saviour, Stephen could not be silent. *Mortal man had never seen what he then saw. While so much of heaven was being revealed, it was the will of God*

that the manifestation should be placed on record, that it might be made known to all the world, and to the end of the world; so that Stephen, who was full of the Holy Spirit, was constrained to cry out, in the hearing of all, and while his eyes continued to be upturned towards heaven, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Brief and terrible were the few minutes that followed that joyful exclamation, and, then, the body of the martyr lay on the bare ground, all bruised, bleeding, swollen, and dead; but his departed spirit had ascended into the heavens, that had opened before him, it had appeared before the glory of God, which even his bodily eyes had been permitted to see, and had been received by the Son of Man, to whom, in his last moments, it had been commended. How different now was the spectacle of his mutilated and perishing body, from the blessedness and glory of his departed soul! It was better for Stephen to be in heaven than on earth, and to be as angels are than to be a mortal man. Mortality was swallowed up of life; and, while all earthly suffering had become a mere memory, fulness of joy and a far more exceeding weight of glory had become a present and would be an eternal inheritance.

Stephen would have relatives that loved him, parents, wife, or children, that bewailed his untimely and violent death; but did he himself, at any time, bewail it? To them it was an irreparable loss; to him an incomparable gain.

Heaven will be an imperishable reality to us as it now is to Stephen. Succession is the law of earth, continuance is the law of heaven. The glories which Stephen saw, and into which he entered, are now identical with what they then were. The very scene disclosed to him, and in which he now lives, will be opened to us, when we shall die to live for ever. There is the same glory of God, and

the same Son of Man, at the same place, the right hand of God. Since the memorable day when the Lord received Stephen's spirit, what multitudes of other departed spirits have also been received by Him into the same glory! and all who have, like the first martyr, been faithful unto death, have had the same welcome, and now participate in the same services, praises, triumphs, and joys.

One inquiry arises out of the opening of heaven, and out of the manifestations of our glorified Lord, to which no positive answer can be given. If heaven, as a place, be distant, how came it to appear to be so near? The Lord did not appear as a distant object, but, in the fulness of His stature, as a man, within speaking distance of man to man, and in the fulness of His glory as the King of Glory. Though heaven is a place, there is a heaven in holiness and in love; indeed heaven is wherever there is a manifestation of the personal glory of God. But Christ had ascended, bodily and visibly, from earth into heaven. Did he, then, in his bodily presence, return from heaven to earth? It is certain that He actually did appear, and that neither in Stephen nor in Paul was there either an optical or a mental illusion. Paul knew Him not, nor could he conjecture who He was, until He said, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Thus, the Lord was both seen and heard, near to Damascus, as He was in Patmos; and, at Jerusalem, though not heard, he was seen. But from the court of the Sanhedrim He was seen at the right hand of God in heaven, so that the right hand of God must have appeared as near as the person of Christ. Was there, then, an interval of absence from the right hand of God, when He appeared to Paul, to Stephen, and to John? This we cannot know. Our ideas of bodies and of motion are those of finiteness and of ignorance. With God nothing is impossible. Natural eyes might be endowed, by Him *that formed them*, with such supernatural power as to be

able, for the moment, to see Christ at the right hand of the Majesty on high; for to doubt this were to doubt the power of God; and the very voice of Christ might be caused to be heard, as though He had been bodily near; or the actual scene in heaven, though distant, might be supernaturally depicted to the senses of favoured men. But it is beyond our province, and, indeed, it must be as presumptuous as it is vain for us to ask how supernatural manifestations were made. As we cannot know how the laws of nature operate, still less can we be able to understand how they were originated, or how, in miracles, they were set aside. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not," said the Lord, "how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"—John iii, 12. In each instance of Christ's appearance the interview was in daylight, when the mental perceptions and bodily organs of those who saw Him were in perfect action; but each revelation, being supernatural, was from God.

CHAP. IX.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO HEAVEN.

THE appearances of angels, in Old Testament times, were suggestive of the existence of an angel world. When Europeans first landed in any newly-discovered country, their complexion, their dress, their ships, and their language, manners, and mechanical engines, were evidence, to the natives, of the existence of countries other than their own, and of superiorities, in civilisation and in race, of which, previously, they had no conception. Angels, though human in form, were, in some instances, so super-human, in splendour and in power, that no earthly region could be supposed to be the place of their habitation. Men knew not what might be beyond the stupendous concave, gemmed with stars, but their imagination peopled the regions above; and, the visible presence of celestial beings on the earth, was a demonstration, to all that saw them, of the existence, somewhere in the boundless expanse, of a celestial world, whence they had come.

Sacrifices for sin, and the forgiveness of sin, in Bible times, had reference to the future life. Longevity and riches have not always been the heritage of the servants of God; nor have the most sinful always been the poorest, most afflicted, or most short-lived of men. The Divine forgiveness was never understood to restore squandered money, to repair injured health or character, or to prolong lives which sin had shortened. It related to man as a moral being; and was desired and promised, not to make men rich, but to save men; so that even the dying, who had no hope relating to this world, desired to be forgiven, that they might not be condemned in another. Thus temples, altars, and burnt offerings, in ancient times,

bore witness to the knowledge of immortality; the voices of eternity evoked responses from human hopes and fears; the Divine favour was sought in reference to the unseen and infinite future; and the dark enigma of this life found its only solution in the belief of a life to come.

The promise of eternal life was included in the promise of Christ. When God said to the representative of the human race, "unto dust shalt thou return," He also said that One should come forth who, while His own heel was bruised, should bruise the tempter's head. The bruising of His own heel indicated suffering in His lower nature; but what was denoted by the bruising of Satan's head? The promise was obviously meant to be the antithesis of the curse; and to involve a reversal of the just and terrible decree of death. The promise of a Saviour, in direct reference to the sentence of death, could be no other than a promise of life. That promise was fondly cherished in the heart of humanity; and, as a tradition, obscured, indeed, and partially misunderstood, it lingered in the memories of all generations until Christ came. The men of all ages silently confessed, by their sacrifices, the justice of the doom of death, and they also, at the same time, prefigured that Divine atonement through which we have eternal life.

The predicted monarchy of Christ was a monarchy of souls. He was not to be of any vulgar race of kings. His kingdom was foretold as one that should endure for ever, and of His dominion there was to be no end. But an imperishable monarchy could not consist of perishable subjects. "Because I live," said He, "ye shall live also."

No part of the Old Testament contains a formulated creed, or professes to be a record of all that the ancients believed and knew. Its contents are chiefly historical, and doctrines are taught incidentally, and, chiefly, by implication, in facts. But, as Christ Himself

testified (John v., 39), the ancient Scriptures bore witness of heaven and of Him. The longevity of antediluvian patriarchs might have tempted them to doubt their own mortality; and yet, as Paul declared, they confessed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims, whose earthly life was a progress to a better.—Heb., xi., 13. They had not seen heaven, nor Christ the way to heaven, yet they confided in the promises of God, and clung to them and “embraced them.” They might have returned to a worldly life, as men whose portion was on earth, but they plainly declared that they desired a better country, that is a heavenly; so that the King of all the heavens did not demean Himself when, after their decease, He said that He was their God.—Heb. xi., 14-16. The hope which they saw afar off is, to us, as the sun in his zenith; but they were in night-darkness, the Sun of Righteousness not having risen, and they saw only the gleam of light, from the unrisen sun, along the line of the distant horizon. They understood little, but they believed all. Immortality was distinctly known to them, and it is declared by Paul that the patriarchs all lived and died, in their successive generations, under the practical influence of faith.

Few men ever moralised more profoundly than Job on the humiliations of death. Very pensively did he contemplate all the sad havoc of the grave; but his words were not those of despair, for he spake as a philosopher and as a believer. He had a Redeemer from death. While all mortals die, that Redeemer lives; and, at the latter day, when previous generations shall be in the dust, He shall stand triumphantly on the earth.—Job xix., 25-27. Job declared that though his body should be destroyed, he should, on that day, in his flesh, and with his bodily eyes, see God his Redeemer; and thus he asserted his own personal identity at the resurrection of the dead. This redemption of his body from death was a certainty, of

which he could say, "I know" that it is so; and the words were so infinitely important that he desired that they should be printed in a book and be chiselled on rock, that they might be read, as they have been and will be, by all generations.

David once bewailed the death of an infant son, and he then comforted himself by saying, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."—2 Sam. xii., 23. These words could indicate only one of two things, reunion in death or reunion in heaven. Of reunion in death the dead can have no consciousness; and to the living, that have no hope, it must be the most melancholy of all things to know that they also must die. The prospect of decay in the same grave with his child, and of their mortal remains being mingled together, could not afford any solace to his afflicted spirit. In weeping over the dead, bereaved hearts find comfort in hope, not in despair. Whither, then, could the departed child have gone, that it should be consoling to the father's stricken heart to think that he should go to him? He could not welcome him back to his home, nor could the child welcome the father to the grave; but that child could welcome him to heaven. The child's death carried David's thoughts into eternity. Embodied and disembodied spirits, though inhabiting distant worlds, were still united by the bond of love, and would soon be together again. Their separation was but as for a moment. He regarded not so much the dead body as the living soul of his child, and, anticipating reunion in the spirit realm, the mourner solaced his grief by saying, "I shall go to him;" I shall soon be with him; and where he is, what he is, and as he is, I also shortly shall be. Thus David's only comfort in his distress was in the hope of heaven.

David expressed the hope of heaven when he said, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward

receive me to glory."—Ps. lxxiii, 24. That glory could not be attained in this life, for it was "afterward," when he should cease to need the guidance of God. What David denominated glory was a habitable place, into which he should be received. Only God could receive him to glory. That glory was the object of his supreme desire, for it so transcended all other things as to bear a name of which all were unworthy. These conditions are not met in the grave, for all earthly glories perish there; but they meet so fully in the heaven of the Bible that New Testament writers call it glory.

David expressed his faith in the resurrection when he said, "My flesh shall rest in hope; for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," or *hades*.—Ps. xvi., 10. He thus expressed his knowledge of the fact that his spirit should reinhabit his risen body. The certainty of his own resurrection led him instantly to advert to that of Christ, for, while his own flesh should rest in hope, he added that God's Holy One should not see corruption, as he himself should.

That immortality and heaven were known, in Old Testament times, is clear from the words of the Shunammite woman, as to her deceased son.—2 Kings iv., 26. That son was her only child, he was born when she had ceased to hope for children, and in answer to prayer; and all her wealth of maternal love was lavished on him. Such a child would be the delight of his parents, and all day long his presence would diffuse joyous sunshine in their house. But, when visiting his father in his field, among the reapers, one morning, he was seized with pain in his head, and by noon, sitting on his mother's knees, he died. With what agony would that fond mother then gaze on the dead body of her child! What silence, broken only by exclamations of anguish, and what gloom would then fill the house! Millions of bereaved mothers, since that day, have known, by bitter experience, all the

anguish which that bereaved woman felt at the death of her only child. And yet, when the prophet Elisha, on Mount Carmel, saw her at a distance, as she approached, to tell her great grief, and sent his servant to ask after the welfare of her little family, she said, in answer to the question, "Is it well with the child?" "It is well." What, well with the child when he was a corpse! Could it be well for an only son, the heir to wealth, to be dead? That child would be welcomed at his birth, with great joy, and his parents would then say, "It is well." As they witnessed his growth in intelligence, and his buoyant spirit from day to day, they would say, with delight and pride, "It is well." His eyes would be bright with vivacity, his mouth would be filled with laughter, his heart would overflow with boisterous merriment, and the fond mother would be wont to say to herself, with deep satisfaction, "It is well" with the child. But, now, the jocund sounds had ceased, the bright spirit, which had basked amidst the joys and affections of an opulent home, had fled; and the child's cherished form had to be given up to corruption. All this was horrible to the deepest instincts of humanity, and yet his mother said that it was well with the child. No stricken spirit, ignorant of heaven, could ever, under such circumstances, have uttered such words. Many heathens and all unbelievers bewail their dead in the anguish of despair. The declaration of a mother, when her child lay dead in her house, that it was well with her child, must have been evidence of insanity or of faith; and as she was not insane she must have been a believer.

The prophet well knew why this woman said that it was well with the child. He himself had seen Elijah ascend to heaven. Visions of angels were not strange to him. Elisha was so frequently a welcomed guest in the Shunammite's house that her husband had built a chamber and provided a bed for him; and the dead child now lay

in that chamber, and on that bed. The prophet could not have been made so often and so much at home in that house, without instructing the inmates in all the truths of Revelation. They called him "the Man of God." Whatever he knew they also would know, for he had taught them. As heaven was well known to him, heaven would be well known to the bereaved mother; and, because it was more desirable to be in heaven than on earth, and because she knew that her child was in heaven, she said that it was well with the child. The child himself, also, could he have spoken to his mother, would have said that it was indeed well with him. He was now beyond all regions of suffering and of death, he was as the angels of God are in heaven, and he abode, like them, amidst the splendours of His presence, and of a truth it was well with him. If he could not return to his mother, she hoped, at length, to go to him, and to be for ever with him; and it was in faith and in hope that she said, in answer to the question, "Is it well with the child?" "It is well." The declaration of her faith, as that of a disciple of Elisha, was equivalent to such a declaration from the great prophet himself.

But while this woman had a believer's faith, she had a bereaved mother's great love and great grief. Her visit to the prophet indicated her faith in the possibility of a resurrection, as well as her faith in heaven. The child having been given in answer to Elisha's prayer, and pursuant to his promise, a promise which, at the time, she heard with an incredulous heart, she now hoped that that child of promise might, by the prophet's prayer, be brought back to life; and she believed that this might be so quickly done that her husband should not hear of his death until he also heard of his restoration to life. She, therefore, from conjugal tenderness, concealed the body in the prophet's chamber, she also concealed the fact

of the child's death; and she asked her husband for an ass and a driver, that she might, on that very afternoon, visit the prophet and return; and to her servant she said, "Drive, go forward, and slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee." Her husband, in his simplicity, imagined that her object was to attend a religious service; and yet, seeing that the assembly could not be either monthly or weekly, the time not being either that of the Sabbath or the new moon, he wondered at her application and her journey. At that time there never had been an instance of resurrection, yet this well instructed woman, believing in the power of prayer, believed that her son might be raised from death; and because she thus believed, and Elisha prayed in faith, her boy was brought back to life; and we learn that seven years afterwards he was yet alive.—2 Kings viii., 3-5. In this case, as in others, the dead would be restored to health as well as to life; and the spirit that returned to the body would be identical with that which left it. The soul, therefore, cannot be subject to extinction in death; even as in sleep it is not. This great event would be eminently instructive, and could not fail to be widely known. Seven years afterwards, the youth was publicly shown to a king, as one who had been raised from the dead. In this miracle we have, at once, a demonstration of the existence of God, an evidence of the life of the human soul when absent from the body, and an instance of the power of prayer.

The promises of life to the righteous, and the threatenings of death to the wicked, by the prophet Ezekiel, can be understood only in reference to eternal worlds. The wicked man is told that, as a consequence of his persistent impenitence, he should die in his iniquities. The prophet intended, by setting before him the greatest of all objects of terror, to appeal to the strongest of all human motives. But the fear of death is far from being the most powerful

of human passions. Men pursue innumerable objects, in which they set their lives at nought, and act regardless of the fear of death. Love and hatred, patriotism and ambition, vanity, jealousy, and the love of strong drink, have such ascendancies as to overcome, for the time, all considerations as to life and death. But the fear thus overcome relates only to such incidents and aspects of death as are known to the senses. From the worlds beyond come forth appeals which awaken the profoundest emotions of the human heart. Were there no future life, there could be no force in the threatening, to an obstinate sinner, that he should die in his iniquities; and such words as life and death, in relation to the unseen future, would have no meaning. If the soul became extinct at the death of the body, and if a man were as non-existent after his death as he was before his birth, it could not be a matter of the slightest importance to him whether, when he dies, he should be forgiven or condemned. In that case it would hereafter be of no consequence to him whether he had been good or bad; for in death a man would be no better than a beast or a worm. But Ezekiel wrote as though his readers believed in immortality. He appealed to a motive to repentance that arose out of that faith; and he showed that eventual and eternal success is not in sin. Were there no future life, successful guilt would, in countless millions of instances, be altogether unpunished, and suffering for righteousness' sake would be unrewarded and unrecognised. A belief in human immortality is thus bound up with a belief in the government of God. To tell the wicked man that he should die in his wickedness, and the righteous that he should have life, was not to speak of the shortness or the length of this mortal life. Longevity is not determined by the moral condition of the mind, but by the natural laws which govern the body; and it may be attained by the

worst of men, as an early death may befall even the best. Dying in sin speaks of eternity. The life of which the prophet wrote was "life eternal." The use he makes of such words shows that his readers understood all this, and believed it. Our Lord appealed to the same faith and the same fear when, in the same words, he said that if men "die in their sins" whither He went they could not go.—John viii., 21, 24. He went to heaven. Heaven is life; exclusion from heaven is death. To die in sin is to forfeit that life, and to incur that death; the second death, which succeeds, and is more terrible than the first. "Why will ye die?" demands the Eternal, through His prophet; and, after the manner of men, He declares, on His oath, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."—Ezek. xxxiii., 11. Ezekiel did not write on the life and death of the soul as though he were revealing what was previously unknown, but rather as one that knew that the doctrine of immortality was perfectly well known; and the object of his appeal was, by the terrors of "the wrath to come," to awaken a greater fear than any that could arise from the greatest sufferings of the present life.

Our Lord distinctly testified that this doctrine was taught in the Old Testament, when He said, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me" (John v., 39); and He showed how explicit was their testimony, and how obstinate is the spirit of unbelief, when He described Abraham as saying to a lost man, in reference to unbelievers, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—Luke xvi., 31.

CHAP. X.

REVELATIONS OF HEAVEN BY CHRIST.

HEAVEN and the resurrection are distinctly revealed in the gospel of Christ. So little was eternal life known among the heathen, that their best writers regarded it, not as a moral certainty, but only as an object of faint and fondly cherished hope; for their faith had not, like ours, any solid bases on which to rest. The disciples of Sadoek, in Judea, the materialists of their time, though they believed in Moses, denied the existence of a future life, and believed that Bible records of supernatural facts were exaggerations of natural phenomena. But Christ made those facts, as also heaven and the resurrection, to be distinctly clear and absolutely certain.

Christ "brought life and immortality to light in the gospel."—2 Tim. i., 10. The original of the word "immortality" denotes incorruption or imperishability, and, in 1 Cor. xv., 42, 50, 53, and 54, it is translated "incorruption;" and the same word, without the negative prefix, is rendered "corruption" in Rom. viii., 21, 1 Cor. xv., 42 and 50; Gal. vi., 8; 2 Pet. i., 4; ii., 12 and 19. In 2 Pet. ii., 12, it is rendered "destroyed," and in Col. ii., 22, it is "perish." What Paul states is that the Saviour brought life and incorruption to light. Incorruption clearly refers to the resurrection body. The body in the present life is being constantly resolved, by respiration, into corruption, and consequently it requires to be replenished with food; but the resurrection body will be incorruptible and imperishable. The idea of immortality is denoted by the word in 2 Tim. i., 10, only because *immortality* will be consequent upon incorruption.

Our Lord's revelations of Himself show that there is another and higher world than this. He affirmed that He had come from heaven and from God. "I know," said He, "whence I came and whither I go." "I am from above." "I proceeded forth and came from God."—John viii., 14, 23 and 42. "I came down from heaven."—John vi., 38. "He came down from heaven; even the Son of Man which is in heaven." "He that cometh from heaven is above all."—John iii., 13 and 31. These words, so simple yet so sublime, which teach the supremacy and divinity of Christ, also teach that there is a heaven whence Christ came; that heaven was His dwelling place before He came to the earth; that, as a Divine being, He was in heaven while, as a man, He was speaking to men; and that, upon His departure from the earth, He should return to heaven. Thus the appearance, and mission, and miracles of the Son of God were visible attestations to men of the existence of heaven, as the world from which He came, and to which, in the body, He would return.

That the soul survives the body was distinctly affirmed by our Saviour, in Matt. x., 28, and Luke xii., 4, when He said, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. They are not able to kill the soul. I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear. Fear Him who, after He hath killed, is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear Him." The soul cannot be killed because it cannot die. Chemical, mechanical, and morbid forces cannot touch it, its nature being kindred to that of God; and when the body is perished the soul is alive, and consciousness is as clear, and conscience, memory, perceptions, understanding, will, and emotions are as perfect when absent from as when present within the body.

Our Lord represented existence in heaven as being life,

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eternal life. Life in its lowest forms is in mere organisms, in which there is growth, reproduction, and decomposition; but life in its highest forms is in heaven; so that the name of some heavenly beings is that of living ones, as "Jehovah," the eternally living One, is the name of God. The Son of God came forth from the region of highest and holiest life, to this world of physical and moral death, that He might give life to all that come to Him. He therefore said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."—John x., 10. The life He gives is not mere existence; it comprises all that constitutes the blessedness and enjoyment of existence. That life is His free gift; and He always identified that gift with Himself, as the Saviour of men. "Christ is our life."—Col. iii., 4. The life was manifested in His person, and the apostles saw it in seeing Him.—1 John i., 1, 2. "I am the resurrection and the life," He said.—John xi., 25. Because He is "the resurrection" we shall rise, and because He is "the life" we shall live. Despair has no existence in His presence, as darkness has no existence in sunshine. In receiving Him into their hearts, by faith, believers receive eternal life. "I give unto them eternal life," He said, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."—John x., 28-30. What simplicity, explicitness, and grandeur are in these few words! They clearly show that by the power and will of God each faithful believer's eternal salvation is an absolute certainty in Christ.

The very name of Christ, as the Saviour, relates to our salvation. "He shall save His people from their sins."—Matt. i., 21. In saving us from our sins, He saves from death, the wages of sin; so that our salvation will be as complete as though we had not sinned. "He that endureth

to the end shall be saved."—Matt. x., 22. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. ii., 10. The end of this life, so far as we can see, is the end of all things; at death, no crown is placed on the head of a corpse; for crowns are worn only by the living; and yet the Lord Himself distinctly affirms that, after "the end" the faithful are saved, and that when they are dead He gives to them crowns of life. Not only is life given, but a crown of life, a life of dignity and glory, a very diadem of life. The spectacle of death suggests ideas very unlike those of Revelation. No horrors are so revolting to our instincts as those of death; and, certainly, no glories are so resplendent as those of heaven. "The light of life" shines on the deepest of all darkness. The grave is flooded with the light of heaven. Though the mortal remains of a Christian perish, his intelligent and sanctified spirit is saved. His earthly life was an era of conflict and of suffering, his heavenly life transcends his highest hope; and his blessedness will never diminish and will never end.

There is no interval between the end of this life and the beginning of the life to come. We find the goal of one to be the gate of the other. The idea of an intermediate world, and of the purifying power of suffering therein, is purely pagan in its origin. One of the romances of the heathen was that there was a purgatory, in which impure souls were purged by fire, before their entrance into elysium. That fiction is in Homer, in Plato, and in Virgil, but in the Bible it is not; nor was it taught in the church until near the end of the sixth century. Since that time, however, it has been employed by the "priests" as a mighty engine of wealth and power; and it has ever contributed to the ruin of millions of souls, for men are encouraged to persist in sin to the very last, in this world, by the false hope of obtaining

a meetness for heaven in another. If any guilty spirit had need to pass through a purifying element, after death, it must surely have been that of the felon who was crucified with Jesus, and who repented not until he was being tortured to death; yet he experienced an instant transition from the ignominy and suffering of the cross to the blessedness of paradise. When his dead body was taken down from the cross, his soul was with Christ. They were crucified together on earth, and they were together in heaven. By his salvation the thief became, like Paul, "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe," a monumental instance of the power of Christ "to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." When the Lord Jesus was dead, He was regarded by lookers-on as a crushed and perished man. Yet, even then, he was "mighty to save;" and the redeemed sinner was with Him in heaven, as the earnest and first-fruit of the great harvest which angel reapers shall gather at the end of the world.

The narrative or parable—for our argument it is immaterial which—of the rich man and Lazarus, teaches great truths relating to the worlds of spirits. Both those men died, both men were buried, both were then out of the sight of the animal world; yet both were alive. That which lived was, in each case, invisible as thought. No man can witness the exit of a soul from its body. Inhabitation, departure, and separate existence, are equally incapable of being understood. When absent from the body, each man well knew the altered conditions of his own existence, and both knew that their conditions were wonderfully reversed, and that the disparity was far greater than during their lifetime on earth; for each knew what and where the other was. In the case of the lost man, there was not only consciousness, there was suffering,—such as might be represented by the action of fire,—there

was recognition, by him, of Abraham and Lazarus in heaven, and there was a recollection of his brothers who were still alive on the earth; and, in his entreaty that an apparition might be sent to warn them, lest they should be tormented, as he was, he showed fraternal sympathy, even in hell.—Luke xvi., 19-31.

In affirming the existence of worlds of disembodied spirits, the Great Teacher showed that He affirmed what had been distinctly revealed to Moses, when God said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." As Moses was then eighty years old, his father would probably be dead; and, certainly, Abraham had been dead three hundred and thirty-one years, Isaac two hundred and sixty-nine, and Jacob one hundred and ninety-eight; yet the Lord did not say I was their God, when they abode in the flesh, but I am now their God, notwithstanding that their bodies are dissolved. He is not the God of the annihilated; for that were to be the God of nothing; and He might as well have declared Himself to be the God of the unborn. In saying "I am their God," He showed that they, as intelligent and moral beings, were still alive. In those words He made two revelations in one; for, while declaring who He Himself was, He revealed the fact that the dead lived as truly as He, the Eternal, lived. The Lord Jesus, as a Divine expositor, said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Matt. xxii., 32. The idea was new, and yet it was so obvious, logical, and unanswerable, that the Sadducees who heard it, and who acknowledged the divine mission of Moses, were astonished and silenced. What was true of the ancestors of Moses was equally true of all others, for the Lord added, "All live unto Him."—Luke xx., 38.

The disciples of Jesus, not comprehending His great work of atonement for sin, on the earth, or His mediatorial

reign over the earth, in heaven, were disconcerted and sad when they heard Him announce His intention to leave this world; but He consoled them with revelations which will comfort the living and the dying until the end of time. "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also. Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. I am the way."—John xiv., 1-6. Everything in the Father's house must bear some correspondence with the dignity and opulence of the Divine Inhabitant and Proprietor; what then must be the magnitude and grandeurs of the house of God! His human family, as a Father, and His ministers and subjects, as a Sovereign, dwell in it. His mansions are many; how many we cannot now know. Had there not been such a dwelling-place for the departed, Christ would have known, and would have told us; for He would not permit His confiding disciples, while suffering and dying in His service, to be deceived by illusions. At this hour He is in that house, and very shortly we shall follow Him; for we cannot long remain in our earthly house. The sentence of death was equivalent to a writ of ejectment, the execution of which is only a question of time. What would become of us, upon leaving our earthly house, had not the Saviour gone to prepare for us another? Heaven is a prepared house. Hell also was "prepared, for the devil and his angels." When a new class of sinners arose in this world, the Divine King would not prepare a second penal world in His infinite monarchy. One was a sad necessity, and *impenitent* sinners who die in their sins, in this world, are doomed to dwell in that. They are "of the devil"

1 John iii., 8), being under his influence, and partakers of his spirit and guilt, and therefore they are tormented with his flame. God places all creatures in elements and in regions adapted to their nature. The departed spirits of men have a nature different from that of angels. The person of an angel is complete. A human spirit is the higher part of the dual nature of a man; but it is only a part of the man. Death separates it from its natural and congenial counterpart; but the sanctified spirit is translated to the mansion in the Father's house, which is made ready for its reception; and it there finds a congenial home. That home is where Christ's glory is. The disciples desired Him not to depart from them; but it was better that He should depart to heaven and that they should follow Him, than that He should remain with them on earth. He, however, will return and raise their bodies from the dead. The disembodied spirit that follows Him is untraceable in its course, and His angels are invisible in conveying it away. It has left the body to be with the Lord, and it is now where He is. The translation is by Him, through Him, and to Him. The way is Christ, the truth is Christ, and the life is Christ. He is the Saviour of men, for His gospel is the "power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."—Rom. i., 16. Because He has prepared a place for us, and will receive us to Himself, He said "Let not your heart be troubled." Your doubts and fears have no foundation in fact; they are the vain and mischievous chimeras of your own incredulous imagination. You are now the heirs of eternal life, and immutable truth has made it absolutely certain that you shall inherit that life, as the gift of God.

The most vivid conception of our glorified nature, that we can form, was suggested by the Saviour, when He solved the difficulty, as to the resurrection, propounded by the

materialists of His day. Speaking of glorified bodies at the resurrection, He said, as reported by two evangelists, that they will be "as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. xxii., 30; Mark xii., 25); and, by a third, that "they will be equal unto the angels."—Luke xx., 36. This He said in special reference to the questions of marriage and death. Like the angels, the risen dead will never marry, never die. The distinctions of sex and the reign of death will cease. There will be no reproduction, no succession. As the angels are, so we shall be. Nothing higher or better could be expected or desired. When timid mortals have trembled and swooned in the presence of angels, and when angels' faces have appeared as lightning, could the human spectators have imagined that they who dwell in houses of clay can ever be so glorified as to become one of them? On no less authority than that of Divine Revelation could such a statement as this be received, as it is and must be received, with the implicit faith of childhood. The transition from the chrysalis of the caterpillar to the beautiful form of the butterfly, though remarkable, is altogether unworthy of comparison with the transition of redeemed and glorified man from mortality and corruption to incorruption and immortality. Frail glow-worms of earth shall shine as the stars of heaven, for ever and ever.—Dan. xii., 3. While equal to the angels in some things, our joy will be greater than theirs; for our ecstasy will be like that of the prodigal, amidst the demonstrations of love with which his return was welcomed; whereas their emotions will be calm as those of the son that never went astray. As the glorified contemplate the depth of the abyss from which Infinite Love has saved them, as they review the mortal perils through which they have been guided, and *as they consider what they once were, and might now have been*, in contrast with what they are and always

will be, and thus contrast earth and hell with heaven, they cannot fail to be "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

The revelations of heaven by Christ were not those only which proceeded from His lips; they comprehend all revelations. In the first promise of God there was Christ, and in every promise there was Christ. Not only is He the life and the way, He is the truth also; for all divine truth is in Him and He is in all. The words of sacred writers were not their own words, but those of Him whose Spirit inspired them, and whose amanuenses they were. The revelations of heaven by Paul and John were Christ's revelations, for He made them; and the light which in our time is shed on all sacred writings is from His Holy Spirit. All "the light of life," whether it gleamed in ancient prophecy or shone forth in the opened heavens of the Apocalypse, was and is from the Sun of Righteousness. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John i., 17.

CHAP. XI.

PAUL'S REVELATIONS OF HEAVEN.

VERY precious revelations of heaven were written by Paul; and he was so thoroughly honest, and had such abundant evidence of the truth of his revelations, that their genuineness is unquestionable. No man was ever more conscientious. Even in the fury of his zeal against Christ, when his very breath was flame, he was thoroughly sincere. It was morally impossible that such a man could be guilty of deception; and, with such evidence of the truth as God gave to him, it was impossible that he should have been deceived. Among all classes of new converts, he showed the dignity, wisdom, and love of a father; and, amidst the violent persecutions which assailed him, through a very eventful career, his fidelity to Christ never wavered, his joy in the prospect of heaven never diminished. The whole gospel was revealed to him without the agency of a teacher; he was endued with such plenary inspiration that he became a distinguished prophet; and the history and the present aspects of the Romish antichrist so exactly correspond with his prophetic portraiture of that great apostacy, as to show it to be true as a photograph. God gave to him miraculous powers, so that he even raised the dead. His spirit was permitted to be present even in heaven itself, for a time. An angel appeared to him at sea, on a dark and stormy night, aboard a ship, just before it was wrecked, whose prophecies of the wreck, as announced by Paul to all on board, were literally fulfilled. His conversion was the effect of a personal revelation of the Saviour to him, at *mid-day*, in the open country, in such supernatural splen-

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dour as blinded and completely prostrated him, until, by miracle, sight and health were restored. The Christian character of this apostle would appear to have been faultless. Delusion and hypocrisy in such a man were equally incredible. Indeed, a more credible witness never lived. His conversion to Christ, and his subsequent character and life, constitute a complete demonstration of the truth of his revelations of heaven.

The very appearance of our Lord to Paul was an evidence of the existence of heaven. The apostles, many months previously, had seen Him ascend to heaven; yet, after the long interval, Paul distinctly beheld Him, and conversed with Him; as he distinctly and repeatedly affirmed.—Acts ix., 27. He saw Him in heavenly glory; in which the risen dead also will see Him; for He will return “in His glory” to raise the dead. A glimpse of that glory was visible in the transfiguration. Never was mortal man able to behold it, without being overwhelmed by the sight; it must, therefore, be beyond our power to imagine the personal splendour of our glorified Lord. Where, then, during the interval between His ascension and His appearance to Paul could Christ have been, but in heaven? and whither, but to heaven, did He return, after His brief interview with the apostle? Where our Lord then was He now is. Others than mortals there see the vision of His glory; and we also, who faithfully love and confide in Him, shall “see Him as He is.”

Paul's vision of Christ was never absent from his memory. Amidst the vicissitudes of a strangely chequered life, heaven was always before him; and, to him, heaven was a more absolute reality even than the earth. Not the slightest element of doubt was in his faith; indeed, the mere idea of distrust in Christ had not a moment's existence in his mind. Paul regarded eternal life, through Him, as the greatest of all moral certainties. Even natural

in life by Jesus Christ."—Rom. v., 17. "By patient continuance in well-doing," he sought "for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life."—Rom. ii., 7. So imminent were the mortal perils amidst which he lived, that he was as one sentenced to death, that immortal life in Jesus might be made manifest in his mortal body.—2 Cor. iv., 10, 11. "We are always confident," he said (2 Cor. v., 6), so that during his wandering and suffering life, his courage never failed; for he saw all things in the light of heaven. Though his outward man decayed, his inward man daily grew stronger. An insincere or an ignorant man would have been appalled by the troubles that befell Paul, in the service of Christ; yet, he was so absolutely sure of heaven, and had such faith in God, that all earthly cares oppressed his spirit almost as little as our hair oppresses our head; and he regarded a lifetime of afflictions as though it were transient as a passing moment, seeing that it should be succeeded by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—2 Cor. iv., 17. To depict that glory would be as impossible as it is to depict the glory of the sun. In comparison with the promised glory, the heaviest and most protracted afflictions are light and momentary. Knowing this, he "looked not on the things that are seen."—2 Cor. iv., 18. To his sublime faith and hope they were as though they were not; for he counted them all as things of nought. His attention was habitually transferred from this ephemeral life of suffering to the life of endless blessedness. He had unceasing, and sometimes, great trials, yet he lived as though he felt them not, and as though he did not know them; for in his full-orbed visions of eternal glory they were the unregarded incidents of a moment. Some of them, indeed, were borne by his mortal flesh, "as for a moment," yet his inward man was unburdened with anxiety, as though he were unconscious even of their existence. He supremely

regarded "the things which are not seen ;" as though they only were visible and real. While he was at home in the body, his heart and his hope were with Christ. An incarnate angel, whose memory was familiar with the splendours of heaven, dwelling for a few years in this sinful and suffering world, could scarcely have had a heart more fully detached from earthly vanities, or more fixed on the unseen glories, than had Paul. All things seen are temporal, all things unseen are eternal. The sufferings and pleasures of this life are as transient as life ; but the glories of the life to come are imperishable, like Him who confers them ; so that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. viii., 18.

Paul had had a glimpse of that glory, in "visions and revelations of the Lord."—2 Cor. xii., 1. His spirit was caught up to the third heaven. That heaven is beyond the atmospheric heavens, and beyond the sidereal heavens ; it is paradise. The act was not his own, it was of God ; and as miracles were generally instantaneous, it would be an instantaneous act. By Divine power he was at once transported to the highest and holiest heaven. The transition was not an ascension, however, like that of Christ and of His saints ; for Paul's body remained on the earth, and was alive. He was in a state of bodily insensibility ; the involuntary functions of animal life being continued, as in sleep. The apostle was distinctly conscious, at the time, that he was in heaven ; but how his spirit could be in heaven and at the same time in the body, or whether he really was or was not in the body he could not tell. There were mysteries in the event, deep shadows of the sunshine, which he could not penetrate or understand. His spirit could not be in two far distant places at the same time, and how he was transported to heaven, and how his relation to his body was

in life by Jesus Christ."—Rom. v., 17. "By patient continuance in well-doing," he sought "for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life."—Rom. ii., 7. So imminent were the mortal perils amidst which he lived, that he was as one sentenced to death, that immortal life in Jesus might be made manifest in his mortal body.—2 Cor. iv., 10, 11. "We are always confident," he said (2 Cor. v., 6), so that during his wandering and suffering life, his courage never failed; for he saw all things in the light of heaven. Though his outward man decayed, his inward man daily grew stronger. An insincere or an ignorant man would have been appalled by the troubles that befell Paul, in the service of Christ; yet, he was so absolutely sure of heaven, and had such faith in God, that all earthly cares oppressed his spirit almost as little as our hair oppresses our head; and he regarded a lifetime of afflictions as though it were transient as a passing moment, seeing that it should be succeeded by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—2 Cor. iv., 17. To depict that glory would be as impossible as it is to depict the glory of the sun. In comparison with the promised glory, the heaviest and most protracted afflictions are light and momentary. Knowing this, he "looked not on the things that are seen."—2 Cor. iv., 18. To his sublime faith and hope they were as though they were not; for he counted them all as things of nought. His attention was habitually transferred from this ephemeral life of suffering to the life of endless blessedness. He had unceasing, and sometimes, great trials, yet he lived as though he felt them not, and as though he did not know them; for in his full-orbed visions of eternal glory they were the unregarded incidents of a moment. Some of them, indeed, were borne by his mortal flesh, "as for a moment," yet his inward man was unburdened with anxiety, as though he were unconscious even of their existence. He supremely

regarded "the things which are not seen;" as though they only were visible and real. While he was at home in the body, his heart and his hope were with Christ. An incarnate angel, whose memory was familiar with the splendours of heaven, dwelling for a few years in this sinful and suffering world, could scarcely have had a heart more fully detached from earthly vanities, or more fixed on the unseen glories, than had Paul. All things seen are temporal, all things unseen are eternal. The sufferings and pleasures of this life are as transient as life; but the glories of the life to come are imperishable, like Him who confers them; so that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. viii., 18.

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retained or affected he did not know; he only knew the fact that he was personally and consciously in heaven. Anyone who saw his body, at the time, would have supposed him to be in a deep sleep; but from such a sleep no one could have waked him, for no man could recall his spirit, while it was "caught up into paradise." Though alive at the time, he was, to this lower and outer world, as one that was dead. If his spirit was then absent from the body, its separate existence, its departure, and its return, must be beyond the lines of our philosophy. But his own experience in this instance was a clear demonstration to him, as it is to us also, that materialism is untrue. Nature is as full of mysteries as Revelation. We know the facts of both, we understand not the facts of either, still less can such a mystery as this be understood. Only God understands; for "secret things belong to the Lord our God." Where the hosts of glorified human spirits, the bodies of glorified and ascended saints, and the hosts of angels are, where our Mediatorial King is, and where is the throne of God, there was the spirit of Paul, after being caught up. Not only was his imagination there, for the presence of the imagination is not a personal presence, it is merely the presence of thought, but Paul's "inward man" was "caught up into paradise," while his "outward man" lay on the earth. While in paradise he heard spoken words. By whom the words were spoken does not appear; but Paul must have understood them, or they would not have been the vehicle of revelations. How he could, in any sense, hear words in heaven, while his body was alive on the earth, is as great a mystery as was the power of the spirit of Moses to hold conversation with Christ and Elijah. He was unable to repeat the words he heard, for they were not such as any mortal is able to utter; but, had it been possible, he would not have been permitted to repeat them. The revelations

made to him were such as we would like to be made to us, for they would be intensely gratifying; were we able to receive them; but silence was imposed, by law, upon Paul. There are things in heaven which we are not permitted to know, and which cannot be known on the earth; for we must enter heaven itself to know them. Other prophets had visions of heaven, but they saw them on the earth, or from the earth. Paul's vision was in heaven itself. When the spirits of the risen dead returned, and reinhabited their bodies, they were not able to remember aught of heaven, the conditions of life in the spirits of the dead being different from the conditions of life in Paul's spirit, for Paul did not die. But though he understood and remembered the things he had seen and heard, he could not describe them; for they were indescribable. As human sciences could not be taught in any rude and simple vernacular of savages, so the things of heaven would be incapable of being expressed in the most affluent of human languages; there not being any correspondences between them. To us "the tongue of angels" would be unintelligible; for Paul declared the words which he heard in heaven to be unspeakable. But had it been possible for heaven to be fully revealed, the revelation would probably have been received with incredulity and unbelief. We know comparatively little of heaven, but the way to heaven is marked out before us like a track of light.

The revelations of heaven to Paul, though not disclosed to us, answered an important end. The Lord said, of him, to Ananias, "he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."—Acts ix., 15. Unexampled qualifications were necessary for his unexampled work, for he had to go, as the messenger of light, into the dense darkness of the empire of heathenism. Vivid memories of the glorified person of Christ, and of an insight into heaven,

well fitted him for his formidable encounters with the pretentious philosophy and brutish ignorance and materialism of the pagan world. He would recount in every place the marvellous revelation of Christ, as he did before king Agrippa; and, though the scenes of paradise were unrevealable, they would be constantly before him, amidst his labours and sufferings among the heathen. And, having had such visions, with what a perfect knowledge of the truth of the Gospel would he prosecute his ministry, and finally encounter martyrdom! His presence on the earth was profitable to the churches, but, for himself, he longed to depart from the body to be with Christ.

"If in this life only we have hope," said this illustrious man, of persecuted Christians, "we are of all men most miserable." He, a scholar, a gentleman by character and position, an employé of the State (Acts xxvi., 12), renounced the comforts of a settled life, became a homeless wanderer, and encountered innumerable earthly sufferings. He did this voluntarily; and yet he was neither a maniac nor an ascetic, but a man of genial sympathies and of great practical wisdom. The end justified the way. He fought the good fight of faith and laid hold on eternal life; and his ministry has been more productive of good to the human race than that of any other man. The influence of his active life has been felt by all generations. At this hour, it is felt wherever Christianity is known, and it will be felt for ever. All his moral power was in his faith. He well knew what and in whom he believed. No illusions enchanted his imagination. All the facts of his life were demonstrations of his faith. As his ministry began with the miraculous vision of Christ, he knew that, as matter of fact, his life of service and suffering, in incessant conflict, would end in "salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."—2 Tim. ii., 10. This salvation he described as eternal life, the gift of God (Rom. vi., 23); as an

everlasting life, which he should reap if he fainted not (Gal. vi, 9); as "the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance (Eph. i, 18); as "the inheritance of the saints in light," for which God had made him meet (Col. i, 12); as "the mark of the prize of his high calling" (Phil. iii, 14); as "the hope laid up for him in heaven" (Col. i 5); as a "crown of righteousness" to be awarded by the righteous Judge (2 Tim. iv, 8); and as "that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour."—Titus ii, 13. Having "the full assurance of hope" of "glory and honour, and immortality, eternal life," he declared that to die would be gain (Phil. i. 21); seeing, that, whatever might be lost, in the loss of life, infinitely more would be obtained in the life to come. The attainment of that life, by the faithful Christian, he knew to be as certain as though it were already possessed; so that he spoke of death, by anticipation, as being already abolished.—2 Tim. i, 10. Death has no more dominion over Christ (Rom. vi, 9), and when He "who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory."—Col. iii, 4. This hope he declared to be guaranteed by the promise of God, who, for our "strong consolation," confirmed it with an oath.—Heb. vi, 18. This hope, as an anchor amidst the storms of life, has fast hold of the Rock of Ages.

The testimony, on the glory that shall be revealed in us, of so competent a witness as the apostle Paul, is of the highest value. The most incredulous of men could scarcely desire more satisfactory testimony than his, given as it was, "by the word of the Lord."—1 Thess. iv., 15. His revelations of heaven and of the resurrection, while they captivate our hope, form, in life and in death, a solid basis on which our faith may rest in assured and perfect security.

CHAP. XII.

THE TESTIMONY OF PETER TO HEAVEN.

THE competency of Peter to bear witness to heaven is beyond dispute. His vision of Moses and Elijah, in glory, at the transfiguration, was evidence to him of the existence of heaven, and of the glorified condition of its human inhabitants. That vision was in daylight, when optical illusions would be scarcely possible, and was on a hill-top, where there were no aids to deception. He referred to it in a general epistle to the churches, written at the close of life, in which he declared himself to have been an eye-witness of the scene, and asserted that, as such, he knew that he had "not followed cunningly devised fables." He distinctly saw the glorified ones from heaven, and the glorified Christ; he heard and understood their conversation; and he heard the voice of God, whose words he recorded, and which, to his latest hour, he never forgot. Those forms of glorified humanity, and that Divine voice, attested the truth of the gospel which brought life and incorruption to light. Peter witnessed also the resurrection and ascension of Christ. On two occasions he was delivered out of prison by visible angels, he, an uneducated man, was endued with power to speak correctly and fluently in many languages; and he had power to work miracles, even, by prayer, to raise the dead.—Acts ix., 40. Thus the ability and authority of Peter, as a teacher of the doctrine of eternal life, were fully demonstrated.

In devoting his life to Christ, Peter everywhere encountered violent opposition; and, before he began his apostolic career, Christ foretold that it would terminate in a violent death (John xxi., 18, 19); and yet he never wavered, never doubted, but, in prospect of death by

torture, he had "joy unspeakable and full of glory."—1 Pet. i., 8.

The body was regarded by Peter as the tabernacle of the spirit.—2 Pet. i., 13, 14. The tabernacle and the tenant were thus spoken of as though they were distinct. "Shortly," he said, "I must put off this my tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." Paul has the same metaphor. One apostle says that we "put off" the tabernacle; and the other, that it is dissolved, that it is a burden, and that though we would not desire to be unclothed, we would be "clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." As the Shekinah left the tabernacle to dwell in the temple, so we leave our frail tent, the body, to inhabit, in the resurrection body, "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." In the disembodied state we are naked. The interval of disembodiment, however, is made no account of, from its brevity, in our eternal life. We would naturally desire not to leave this tabernacle, in death, but to be clothed upon, and thus to be changed from the condition of mortality to that of life; as they will be who are alive at the coming of the Lord. But we are "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Our instincts shrink from the transition; but we have faith and joy in the prospect beyond. The departure from the body, Peter says, is an "exodus," translated "decease."—2 Pet. i., 15. The word denotes departure, going out, as on a journey. In our exodus we do not cease to exist, we are not in a "soul-sleep;" but we leave one habitation for another; our exodus being from the body only to return to the body, after a temporary absence. The object of our lively, or living hope is represented by Peter as an inheritance.—1 Pet. i., 4, 5. He describes it negatively. No elements of dissolution will cause it to be corruptible; no moral evil will defile it, it will be

amaranthine (as in the Greek), unfading, blooming for ever. Thus, it is described by what it is not, rather than by what it is; but the words denote imperishability, purity, beauty. It is "ready to be revealed in the last time;" that is at the last day. In the hope of this inheritance "we are begotten again," for a second birth, a birth from death and the grave, "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." All the conditions thus indicated clearly refer to our resurrection, of which we have a lively hope in Christ's resurrection, and of which only may it be said that it is "ready to be revealed in the last time." The certainty of this hope is expressed in its being "reserved in the heavens." While every earthly hope is perishable, this hope is laid up, beyond the reach of human vicissitudes, for us, who "are kept by the power of God, through faith," unto salvation; so that though, judged by sense, it might be deemed the most improbable of all things, it really is the most certain of all. Our promised inheritance will be in ourselves, in our glorified body, which will be incorruptible by disease or decay, will be undefiled by sin, and will be unfading in bloom, in its power of vision, and in its capacities of action and enjoyment.

The teaching of Peter, that our promised inheritance includes the risen and glorified body, is confirmed by Paul, who states that the Holy Spirit "is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of our purchased possession" (Eph. i., 14); and that by the Spirit we "are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. iv., 30), which will be the day of resurrection. The sufferings of this present life were regarded by him as being beneath comparison with the glory that shall then be revealed in us. We now wait in earnest expectation of the resurrection manifestation of the sons of God; being now subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected us

to the same, in hope. Our body itself, Paul affirms, shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty (or the liberty of the glory) of the children of God; and the whole human creation, groaning, together in grief and in desire, now waits for the adoption, "the redemption of our body."—Rom. viii., 18-23.

Our eternal life is denominated "glory" and "eternal glory."—1 Pet. v., 1 and 10. We apply the word to objects, elements, and phenomena of grandeur and beauty, for which we have not any specific names. Human eyes have seen phenomena from heaven, designated "glory," from which some faint conception of the glory of heaven itself may be formed. Paul calls the splendour of the Lord's person, which he saw, "the glory of that light," the sight of which made it impossible for him to see anything else.—Acts xxii., 11. That glory was "above the brightness of the sun."—Acts xxvi., 13. The Shekinah is repeatedly called "the glory of the Lord." Christ is "the Lord of glory," and "the King of glory." The supernatural cloud that covered the scene of the transfiguration was "magnificent glory." The Lord spake of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.—John xvii., 5. He will "come in the glory of His Father" (Matt. xvi., 27), "with great power and glory" (Mark. xiii., 26); when He will present us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24); and we shall "appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii., 4); so that we now "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."—Rom. v., 2.

Could we have seen Divine glories, as favoured eye-witnesses saw them, we might have been able to judge of the unseen. But even we are familiar with the glories of material worlds. The exquisite beauties of flowers and of landscape scenery, the grandeurs of mountains and rain-bows, the magnificence of gorgeous clouds at sunrise and

sunset, the brilliant blue of the infinite concave by day, and the stupendous scenery of the starry heavens by night, and the dazzling splendours of the sun, are such as could never be imagined from mere description, by one that never saw light; for the born-blind cannot imagine the ideas denoted by the words. These glories must be seen to be known. As the born-blind vehemently yet vainly long to see them, so we would even now desire to see the infinitely greater glories of heaven. A glorified spirit, a glorified body, the glorified earth, and the heaven of glory, our eye hath not seen, nor hath it entered into our heart to conceive. "The glory of the celestial is one, the glory of the terrestrial is another." Even one sun differs from another sun in glory. The glory of heaven differs from all, and is superior to all. It is pre-eminently "glory." That is its name. The ascended Christ was "received up into glory." He will "bring many sons unto glory." Even the word glory is insufficient to designate the opulence, blessedness, and dignity of our eternal future, which are repeatedly described as "riches in glory."—Eph. i., 18; Phil. iv., 19. The angels and men that came forth from glory were "patterns of things in the heavens." The glory of Moses and Elijah in heaven, as seen on the earth, indicates correspondent glories which, in their several degrees, other saved ones have. Even Moses' mortal face, after appearing before the glory of God, was so dazzling, that men could not look on him until he was veiled. What, then, must be the glory of angels and of men that "stand continually in the presence of God!" That presence of the Infinite is absolutely incomprehensible. The glory of Moses and Elijah, and even the angelic splendours before which Daniel fainted, are as inadequate representations of Him, as are our little earthly lights of the sun. Heaven is glory, and Jehovah is "the God of *glory*."

CHAP. XIII.

APOCALYPTIC VISIONS OF HEAVEN.

THE last revelations of heaven were made to "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and they are the clearest and fullest of all; for he saw into heaven itself. He was aged and an exile when Christ and heaven were revealed to him; and probably he was the last on whom the gift of tongues was bestowed, and to whom inspiration and the power of working miracles were given.

A large portion of the Apocalypse is prophecy. A series of wonderful symbols was unrolled before the apostle, the exact correspondences of which are in history; for great national events have clearly deciphered the enigmas which not even John himself understood. The ruins of Ephesus and Laodicea, and the annals of all nations which "gave their strength" to the Papacy are expositions of the meaning of this book, and demonstrations of its truth. The evidence of that truth is cumulative, and the book whose unexplained obscurities perplexed devout believers in every age, and evoked the infidel's derision, is now clearly seen to be a prophetic summary of the history of eighteen centuries. Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," and Allison's "History of Europe," are two unintended expositions of the "seals" and "trumpets" and several of the "vials" in the Revelations of John. Thus the fulfilment of one class of prophecies guarantees the future fulfilment of another; and the earth, with her ruined cities, her wild, and huge, and fearful tragedies, and the conflicts of "the beast" with the Lamb, bear witness to the truth of the *revelations of our eternal life and glory.*

When our glorified Lord reappeared to John, He was heard before He was seen. The aged apostle was "in the spirit," as though absent from the external world, when the Lord addressed him. He instantly recognised the voice of Him from whom, in early manhood, he had been wont to hear words of instruction, and of love, and of miraculous power; though now it was like that of a trumpet. During the previous threescore years that voice had been heard only in the highest heaven; and when next it shall be heard on the earth, it will awake all the dead, and call forth the whole human race to judgment.

Voices have repeatedly been heard from beings whom the hearers could not see (Ex. xix., 19, Deut. iv., 12, 1 Kings xix., 12, 13, Is. xl., 6, Dan. iv., 31, Matt. iii., 17, xvii., 5, John xii., 28); but John had the evidence of his eyes as well as of his ears, for he saw and knew the person of our Divine Lord. Having heard Him declare Himself to be the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, he turned to look, when, lo! there appeared seven golden lamps, which, as afterwards explained to him, represented seven churches, and in the midst of these stood the living Saviour. The last time John had seen Him was in the heavens, disappearing in a cloud. Upwards of sixty years had passed since then; but time makes no change in the glorified body of the Lord, for He who cannot die cannot decay. There now stood before the apostle the very form and features with which, in his earlier days, he was perfectly familiar; and he instantly recognised them; but though identically the same, they appeared in Divine splendour. The Lord was our High Priest and the King of kings, yet He was not arrayed in priestly or in royal costume. The insignia were peculiarly His own. No other ever appeared, like Him, with eyes resembling flames of fire, with a face shining like

the sun in his strength, with hair like snow, with feet like molten brass glowing in a furnace, with a voice like the majesty of a cataract, with words that pierced like a two-edged sword, and with stars in his hand. All this was emblematic, but all was real. The Lord Jesus stood before him in His glory, and John was so affected by the sight that he fainted, and fell at His feet as though he had been dead. The very sight of Jesus, after so long an absence, would, under any circumstances, have been very affecting; but to see Him so unexpectedly, so suddenly, and in great glory which exceeded even that of the transfiguration, which also John saw, was more than frail humanity could sustain. With what loving sympathy would the Divine Man look on the aged disciple that lay at His feet, unconscious from terror! and with what compassion would He bring him back to himself, and reassure his troubled spirit! He laid His right hand upon him, that hand in which was still the print of the nail, and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of *hades* and of death."—Rev. i., 17, 18. When John's consciousness and strength returned, he reverently listened to the Lord, and was charged with messages to several churches, and with prophecies which afterwards came to pass.

After this vision, John was favoured with such insights of heaven as no other mortal ever had. "The door of heaven was opened" before him (Rev. iv. 1), and a celestial voice, powerful as that of a trumpet, said to him, "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." John's spirit was then translated up thither, as though it had left the body, to receive revelations. He was "in the spirit." The first object he beheld was the greatest of all. "A throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne." In a later vision a

similar sight appeared. "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it."—Rev. xx., 11. Thus John, "in the spirit," saw God on His throne in heaven. No sight was ever comparable with that. What then was the appearance? John says but little about the throne, while about "Him that sat on it," he is absolutely silent. God is indescribable; and, being the Infinite Spirit, He has no form, nor is there any place in which He can be said to be resident, as creatures are. Manifestations of the presence and glory of God have been seen, but "Him," personally and properly, "no man hath seen nor can see." God Himself is absolutely invisible. No eye can see the Infinite. And yet, John says, "I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it." He saw no form on the throne, except when he saw Christ; but he saw the glory of "Him that sat on it." No form appeared in the Shekinah, over the mercy seat; and when the glory of God was seen by Moses and by Israel, by Elijah and by Isaiah, there were supernatural and Divine phenomena, which they distinctly saw; but similitude there was not.—Deut. iv., 12. In no revelation of God is one word given that could suggest an idea from which an artist could paint a picture, or chisel an image. "God is a spirit."—John iv., 24. And yet there is a manifestation of His glory, called "the Presence of the Lord," of which men have had glimpses on the earth, and which would appear to be unceasingly visible to all that are in heaven. That "presence" John saw, "in the spirit;" it will be always seen in heaven; and that "presence" we shall see when, being "absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord."

Though John could not describe Him that sat on the throne, he described the surroundings of the throne, as *they* appeared. The government of God was represented by the symbol of "the throne." The appearances were not

of things as they actually were and are, as beheld by the inhabitants of heaven; they were emblems; and, as such, they were intended to be instructive. The language of emblems is full of meaning, and it was the first of all languages for the eye. The imagination of ancient orientals delighted in its use, and they employed it in the records of their earliest history. The ornate ritualism of ancient and modern times taught, and still attempts to teach, by expressive emblems, as "figures of the true." The whiteness of the throne in heaven denoted the spotless purity of Him that sat thereon, and the perfect righteousness of His government of men; and the "rainbow round about the throne" was a beautiful image of the majesty and mercy of God, in the forgiveness of sin; amidst lightnings, thunder, and voices from the throne, the rainbow indicated peace and hope, and love on the earth.

John saw angels and men near to the throne. The forms of the angels are not described, only their faces. They are denominated living ones, with faces which severally denoted majesty, strength, intelligence, and activity; and they had wings, like the seraphim which Isaiah saw, which were full of eyes, the emblems of light and discernment. The words of adoration, which Isaiah heard in the temple, John also heard from the living ones in heaven, as they proclaimed the holiness of God. These worshippers were real creatures; their faces only were emblematical. Near to the throne were also twenty-four men. They were redeemed men, for they sang of redemption by the blood of the Lamb. Their holiness was denoted by the whiteness of their raiment. They were victors, and, as such, were enthroned and crowned. In their hands were censers, and harps of gold; and music accompanied their songs of praise, which, as songs of redeeming love, were new among the melodies of heaven.

These glorified men, it is said, will reinhabit the earth and reign thereon. They paid homage before the Divine throne, laying their golden crowns before it. On every side, beyond this scene, was a vast expanse, a transparency, like a sea of glass. This first vision John, "in the spirit," saw through the opened door of heaven; and others of like character succeeded it. The visions passed before him like a prophetic panorama of historic symbols, which have been verified and explained by many obvious correspondences in the histories of all those nations that were enthralled by the Papacy,—that strangest power ever known, that most arrogant and sanctimonious parody on the government of Christ.

In the visions of this book John saw what actually was in heaven, as well as foresaw great ecclesiastical and national events which should be, and most of which have been, on the earth. Having gazed on a succession of apparitions of famine, persecution and war, such a scene appeared in heaven, and such an anthem pealed forth, as no man, in the body, ever saw or heard. A magnificent assembly of holy and happy beings was before the throne, whose number was incalculable. They were robed in white, the emblem of purity, and had palms, the tokens of victory. This immense throng were offering praise, and John heard their song. He desired to know who were these holy and rejoicing choristers, yet hesitated to ask; but a glorified man, an elder, seeing him looking and listening, approached and asked him the very question that was on his tongue. What are these which are arrayed in white raiment, and whence came they? Had John answered, he might have said, Surely these never dwelt in any world but heaven. Such happy beings could not have encountered the woes, or the vulgar indignities, or the brutal violence of such a world as that to which I belong. Those spotless robes were never steeped in sin.

Those blessed ones never drank "the cup of trembling." Those occupants of thrones never sat in dismal dungeons. Those crowned heads were never wrinkled with care or racked with pain. Those acclaiming voices never uttered words of suffering. Thus might John have judged; but he answered not. Only the heavenly one from earth, that asked that question, could answer it; and he answered it by making the astonishing revelation that these were they which came out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.—Rev. vii, 13, 14.

The innumerable multitude which John saw in heaven, had been acquainted with sin and suffering. Some of those white robes had been red as scarlet and as crimson; yet now they were pure from sin. What a change from what they had been to what they were! A man whose spirit is artful, whose temper, like a match, is ignited by the slightest friction, and whose memory is a Newgate calendar, may become guileless, gentle, and pure-minded as a little child. A moral stain on the conscience is, humanly speaking, indelible. No man can undo the evil he has done, or cause the guilty to be innocent; nor can any man cleanse his soul in floods of tears. And yet the polluted robes of the ransomed ones were now so pure that not an indication of defilement could be detected; for Christ poured forth his life-blood that the foulest human heart might, through His atonement and by His Spirit, be made holy. The eye of Infinite Holiness may now look upon the purified, before the splendours of His throne, and the clearer the light is the more manifest does their purity become. Thus sinners, who, had there not been redemption, would have been dark spirits in the world of despair, become holy and happy worshippers in the high temple of the universe.

The history of man is, alas! a long and dreary recital

of suffering and crime. Men, more ferocious than tigers, have found fiendish gratification in torturing their fellow-men; justifying their foul crimes by their own foul slanders. Were all the cruelties to be recounted, which the good and gentle have endured from tyrants, were all the annals of their slavery to be unrolled, were all the atrocities of priests and kings to exterminate truth, which they nicknamed heresy, to be narrated, were the secret horrors of papal inquisitions to be unveiled, were all the anguish of all that preferred martyrdom to sin to be rehearsed, were we to know of all the broken hearts that loved Christ, and were each of the glorified to describe all his earthly sufferings of mind and of body, any of us, upon receiving the terrible revelations, and upon seeing the venerable throng, would say, as the elder said to John, "These are they which came out of great tribulation." But those redeemed sufferers are now before the throne; not behind it, in obscurity; nor beneath it, as vanquished; but before it, in distinction; as though He "who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven" (Ps. cxiii, 6), would look on them in love, and would have them in His presence, where there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand where there are pleasures for evermore.—Ps. xvi, 11.

Perpetual life delights in unceasing action. The highest enjoyments of intelligent creatures are in the service and worship of God; and memory yields a host of high satisfactions to all those whose earthly lives were practically consecrated to God. Having won the battle of life, the victors recount to each other the incidents of their campaigns. Were this to be done by each to every other, the recitals would extend over incalculable time; and with untiring interest they might be repeatedly resumed. There are also histories of angels, of perished empires, and of flourishing and of extinct worlds of creatures. Innumerable

volumes are in the library of eternity. Each one of the hundreds of millions of suns, all the planets of each sun, and every moon, will have the story of its birth to tell; and that of the creation, character, and conduct of its inhabitants; together with the memorable occasions when they were honoured with visits from the angel princes of heaven. "Thou hast created all things," said the redeemed to God, "and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. iv., 11); from which it is clear that they are students of creation. Knowing the magnificence of the material universe, they exclaimed, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty;" and knowing the perfect equity of His moral government, they added, "Just and true art Thou in all Thy ways, Thou King of Saints."—Rev. xv., 3. The inspired writers frequently descant on the manifestations of the character of God in the material world. If heaven be so stupendous and glorious a world as the analogies of the universe would suggest, its magnitude and grandeurs must be altogether inconceivable; and inconceivable time would be required to discover all its beauties and glories. Millions of worlds in the Father's infinite house would then invite the attention of His children; and, fixed and clustered in groups, in endless perspective and over boundless space, those worlds would unfold their wonders and the histories of their inhabitants before them. The Creator has revealed His own character in His works. Every existing thing represents a pre-existent idea in the mind of God; and in each form of life are wonders and mysteries which even the microscope fails to reveal. The sciences we now study probably belong to every other world; and none of us know little more than the mere alphabet of science. In the spirit world we may sit at angels' feet, as learners; but when millions of earthly years and ages have passed, infinitely numerous wonders and scenes of grandeur will still be unknown to us.

It may be inferred from the moral character of the inhabitants of heaven, that they delight in all the offices of love, and that they form one great world of loving friends. They who were strangers to each other, on earth, will be friends in heaven. The saints of all countries and of all ages will be members of one family. Indeed, the relations of Angels and Heaven to the holy races of all other worlds may be so intimate that the whole intelligent universe of holy beings may form one stupendous community, in which selfishness is unknown, as sin. The agitations of human passions are as absent from heaven as are the electric and ocean storms of the earth. Loyalty to God and mutual love are the all-pervading laws of all hearts, so that in unceasing life there is the action of unceasing love. Angels will have far greater intercourse with distant holy worlds than with our apostate world; and to them, more frequently than to us, will they be sent forth to fulfil the pleasure of the supreme Lord of all.

The glorified whom John saw before the throne were ineffably happy. Their palms were tokens of victories, achieved amidst the conflicts of their probationary condition; and their songs of praise were spontaneous expressions of such great joys as none but the redeemed can know. Great sufferings leave indelible footprints behind. Our wounded sensibilities retain their scars even to the goal of life. After our translation, indeed, the scars of suffering will be obliterated from emotion, though not from memory. John could not have imagined, from all that he saw and heard, that the throes of agony had been endured by those enraptured ones, that their snow-white robes had been defiled, or that they who stood nearer than angels to the eternal throne had ever wandered so far from God and from heaven as to be close to the very gates of hell. The palms they held were not won in military conflicts. The King of Heaven awards

no palms to exterminators of alleged heresy. It is the wolf that persecutes, not the lamb. "Defenders of the faith" have been most flagrant transgressors of all law. Such men are unknown in heaven. The greatest conquerors overcame their own sins and the power of suffering, and by "faith and patience they inherited the promises." Their hearts were purified by faith, and all their sufferings were calmly and bravely borne. They were set at nought by pride, they were crushed by power. But all impulses of revenge, all powers of temptation, all anguish, all love of life, and all fear and agonies in death, were overcome by gentleness, patience, and sublime faith. The mariners who have contended with the wild furies of ocean storms may narrowly escape with their lives, bringing, with heavy labour, only a dismantled and shattered hulk to the haven; and the soldier, who has battled with invaders, may return, covered with sweat, and dust, and blood, having a maimed limb or indelible scars. But not one in this resplendent throng before the throne is worn out with toil, or presents any scars of suffering. Not the slightest stain is on their white robes, nor is there any trembling in the hands which hold the triumphal palms. In looking through "the door of heaven," John stood outside; could he have stood within, they might have unfolded before him all the blessedness they now enjoy, and he might have heard more perfectly the enravishing melodies of their song.

When the aged apostle saw this vision, the Church was about to encounter a long succession of relentless persecutions. The eyes of suffering Christians became fountains of tears; and probably every one in the great multitude in heaven had wept on the earth. But the glorified man said to John, in words of exquisite tenderness and beauty, that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."—Rev. vii., 17. Only man can weep; but some

human emotions are too deep and acute even for tears. The dying, though they suffer, never weep; and they that die in the Lord will never again know tears.

After the apostle had seen this glorious vision of heaven, a new series of prophetic symbols, representing the conflicts of the church with persecuting powers of the earth, during the dark mediæval ages, passed in panoramic order before him. During those ages the persecuting furies were rampant, they reigned unchecked, as though they would reign for ever; and while the gentle and faithful suffered from the cruel zealots, who would "wear out the saints of the Most High" (Dan. vii., 25), those sufferers appealingly cried out, "How long, O Lord, how long?" How little did blind and cruel men imagine that the despised and hated disciples of Jesus, whom they called heretics, passed away, from the dark and turbulent scenes of this world, into the blissful glories of such a realm as that which opened before John! In this vision, a brief interval at length appeared, in the long and tragic scene, as though the wild and savage assailants of the Lamb were restrained. In the pall of storm-clouds, that covered the earth, was an opening, in which the serene calmness and sunshine of celestial regions beyond were disclosed, to comfort the distressed, by showing that, though apparently vanquished, they shall subsequently be victors for ever. While tempests of human wrath swept over the earth, expending their fury on men "of whom the world was not worthy," a great concourse, which no man could number, was silently and invisibly forming on high, on Mount Sion. A hundred and forty and four thousand, "redeemed from the earth," were representatives of innumerable others, being only "the first fruits to God and the Lamb," a mere sample of the great harvest; and so manifestly did they belong to God, that His name is said to have been written on their foreheads. They were undefiled by the great harlot of

Babylon, were guileless, were "without fault before the throne of God," and, in all things, were followers of the Lamb.

While John beheld the great throng, a volume of voices in praise, from amongst them, reached his ears. It was as the voice of a mighty cataract, or of great thunder, and yet it was soft as angels' melodies, being the celestial voice of congregational singing. A magnificent assembly of harpers sang the high praises of their Saviour, attuning their harps to their song. The heavenly concert was distinctly audible; but John, though a delighted and silent listener to the holy choir, yet being outside heaven, could not join in the song of the spirit choristers on Mount Sion; nor did the Lamb that was with them, nor the four living ones, nor the elders, though they all were in heaven.

"No man could learn that song;" nor could any man teach it. It was the spontaneous hymn of praise, sung in concert, by holy beings, whom Infinite Love in Christ had rescued from the second death, and to whom eternal life, and glory, and joy had been freely given. The song was new in heaven, for the joy was new, and the singers were new; the joy being that of salvation, and the singers having been translated from our distant and fallen world. Sinners had been expelled from heaven; but, until the translation of Abel, no redeemed sinner had been admitted into the presence of God, and the fellowship of angels. A sinner saved by grace could not cry "holy, holy, holy," as though he himself had never been otherwise than holy, and thus offer homage with the sinless before the throne; nor could they, like him, offer praises to redeeming love. In the persons of glorified men, a new race of beings appeared in heaven; and, in His justification of the unjust, by grace through faith, a new development of the character of God was made, for He magnified the law in the very act of saving them that had transgressed it. As,

age after age, others, whose bodily voices are silent in death, followed the first martyr to heaven, his new song, in solo, became the grandest of all choruses; and new accessions are now being hourly made to their number, so that the grandeur of that chorus is hourly augmented. But not one of the glorified learns that song. It comes forth from their ecstatic joy, and from their grateful and adoring love. The song which cannot be learned, breaks forth spontaneously and irrepressibly from those transports which none but the redeemed can know. Not only are the saved ones in heaven, but a heaven is in them; their very hearts sing.

Each of the glorified had tasted death, and many had been martyrs for the testimony of Jesus. A martyr's end seemed to be most miserable. No unbeliever could have pronounced him blessed that died of torture; yet in heaven he was blessed, and is so; and at the resurrection his blessedness will be complete. Heaven itself bears witness to his blessedness, as that of one that dies in the Lord. A voice from heaven directed the apostle to write, for the comfort of Christians in all generations, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."—Rev. xiv., 13. It is more blessed to be without the body, in heaven, than to be within the body, on the earth. Though every instinct shudders at the presence of the king of terrors, and though the death of one man may be an irreparable loss to others, the exchange of earth for heaven is not to be lamented; for the experience of every one in heaven is an endorsement of the writing from heaven, that "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." We that are in the body experience one condition only; they have experienced both. We bewail our dead, and regard their mortal remains with deep, and tender, and sorrowful

compassion; but we ourselves are regarded by them with a compassion deeper than our own. Could communications be reopened between us and them, so that they could address our sorrowing spirits, they would testify how little their blessedness justifies our grief at their departure, and how different are their joyous praises from our elegies of sorrow, and their white robes from our sombre mourning on their account. As men we weep, as Christians we believe; and, believing, we rejoice, even in our greatest griefs for the dead.

"Their works do follow them." Though salvation "is of faith that it might be by grace" (Rom. iv., 16), "every man shall receive his own reward."—1 Cor. iii., 8. From memory and from conscience there cannot but be self-satisfaction and self-reproach. Earthly things are left on the earth; but no man can separate character, or conscience, or memory, or love, or hatred, from his personal identity, and cast them away; for they essentially belong to his mental and moral nature. Men, by their moral conduct, now determine what and where they will hereafter be. All past time is always present in its results, and thus eternity bears witness to the events of time. As both the spirit worlds are governed by the laws of proportion and correspondence, there must be great inequalities in the rewards of one and in the retributions of the other; so that the saved inherit unequal honours and unequal blessings. One, having obtained mercy and renewing grace early in life, consecrated his life to God, sowing to the Spirit; but another wantonly and wickedly cast away all the golden opportunities of life, as though they had been worthless, and did not obtain eternal life until the very end of his mortal career. It would not be possible for these two to be equally blessed in heaven. There are great disparities in glory, as "one star differeth from another star in glory." One is a form of brilliant beauty;

another is a faint and indistinct speck of glimmer, scarcely discernible on the dark back-ground of sky. "So also is the resurrection of the dead."—1 Cor. xv., 42. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."—Gal. vi., 7.

Various metaphors, in the book of Revelations, depict the blessedness of eternal life; such as freedom from sickness and pain, from hunger and thirst, from heat and cold, and from darkness, weeping, oppression, and war. Music and singing, bridal vestments, a nuptial banquet, and living fountains of water, betoken great joy; white linen denotes purity; and crowns and palms the conquest of sin and suffering. Tears, and cries, and sighing will never be known; and death will be a mere tradition of the distant and melancholy past. Standing near to the door of heaven, and listening and looking within, John distinctly saw "the ransomed of the Lord," and heard resounding hallelujahs, in the grandest oratorio of eternity. Well might John say, after all his visions of heaven, in response to the words, "Surely, I come quickly," "Even so, come Lord Jesus;" as though he had said, since heaven is so glorious a world, I cannot be there too soon.

CHAP. XIV.

THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION.

It cannot be said that the dead cannot rise again, seeing that, as matters of fact, dead men have already been raised, and that they were raised in the condition of health, and continued to live. But the dead thus raised—the resurrection saints excepted—had not been subject to corruption; their bodies, as such, being as perfect in death as in life. There was a return of their departed spirits, and a revivification of their dead bodies; but a reconstruction from decomposed and undiscoverable elements there was not. It will be otherwise, however, with nearly all that shall be raised at the last day. Nearly all the dead have completely disappeared. Though a few traditions, literary works, works of art, languages, and ruins of the cities of the ancients are still extant, and though perished generations are represented by a few solitary mummies, the ancient dead are as undiscoverable as the unborn.

But every unit in the mighty aggregate of our race will reappear; for the Son of God distinctly said that "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."—John v., 28, 29. They will come forth at once; not as they were born, in successive ages, but "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible, and we—the living—shall be changed."—1 Cor. xv., 52.

Though every miracle is incomprehensible, yet if one

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can be deemed greater than another, the resurrection of a human body, whose constituent elements have been chemically changed, must, as a work of God, be almost co-ordinate with that of creation. The general resurrection will not consist of one such miracle only, but of as many as there are, and have been, and shall be human beings on the earth; so that their number will be incalculable.

But neither mystery nor magnificence, however great they may be, can justify unbelief in the revelations of God. Resurrection cannot be a greater work than creation; for to reorganise existing elements must be a less work than it was to create them out of nothing. But, were it even greater, it could not require greater power than the power of God; to which nothing, not being a contradiction, is impossible.—Matt. xix., 26. Our faith in this stupendous doctrine rests, in absolute security, on the bases on which our Divine Teacher founded it, *viz.*, on the Scriptures and the power of God.—Matt. xxii., 29. God is able to raise the dead, as He was first able to give life to organisations which did not live; that is certain; and it is equally certain that God has said that the dead shall be raised. Indeed, so explicit are His declarations that He will raise the dead, that nothing more explicit can be found in any Bible prophecy that has already been fulfilled. He has said it, and He will do it. That is all we know; and that is enough. We believe in His word; we also believe in His power. “Behold,” said Jeremiah, “Thou hast made the heaven and the earth, by Thy great power, and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee.”—Jer. xxxii., 17. He Himself demanded of Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord” (Gen. xviii., 14)? and to Jeremiah He said, “Behold, *I am the Lord*, the God of all flesh; is there anything too *hard for Me?*”—Jer. xxxii., 27. The apostle Paul, like

the Lord Jesus, encounters all the difficulties which sense and science find in the doctrine of resurrection, by pleading the power of God, in "the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."—Phil. iii., 21.

As the resurrection must require the exercise of inconceivable power, nothing so staggers the weak, and doubting but anxious heart of humanity as the prophecies of the resurrection. We hear of heaven, of angels, and of spirits, and we believe in them, as objects whose existence, being unseen, we cannot deny; but disease, and death, and decomposition, are visible realities, and the palpable and living forms of men so completely disappear that, a thousand years after their death, they seem to be as non-existent as they were a thousand years before their birth. Thus all the observations of sense contradict our faith. Were a human corpse permanently to retain its form and organisation, so that all the dead should be like so many mummies, their condition would resemble that of the favoured few whose resurrections are circumstantially described in the Bible; and faith in the resurrection might be easier; for the dead would, in that case, appear to be kept in waiting, for the action of God's revivifying power. But, as their destruction is complete, unbelievers deny that they can rise again; and thus, misled by sense, they "do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

Unbelievers in the resurrection have appeared in several sects of materialists. The Sadducees, though they believed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in which the doctrine is taught, resolved facts into figures of speech, and thus by misinterpretation they erred, rejecting the most comforting revelations which God has vouchsafed to men. In hearing the apostles preach the resurrection, the heathen heard with astonishment and scorn. There were two schools of "science, falsely so called," among them, in

both of which the doctrine was disbelieved. The Epicureans denied it, in denying everything not known to consciousness or sense; and the Gnostics, who regarded the incarnation of the soul as an evil, opposed the resurrection, as being a return to evil and to bondage. Some of the latter, of whom were Hymenæus and Philetus (2 Tim. ii., 17), in becoming Christians, retained their old opinion. They resolved a material into a spiritual truth, by resolving resurrection into regeneration, as though it were a death unto sin and a life unto righteousness; and thus they said that the resurrection was past already. In this, Paul affirms, they erred; and so pernicious was the error, that it was declared to be a gangrene in the church, eating out its very life.

When Paul addressed King Agrippa and his court, he asked, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?"—Acts xxvi., 8. It would have been very easy for any of his hearers, in reply to that question, to have said, Look into any ancient grave, where formerly dead men lay, and where now, being utterly perished, they are not, and in that grave you will see the reason why. The unbeliever sees, in ancient sepulchres, no tenant but despair; and in every human grave he sees despair. But though nothing better than despair appears to him, Revelation gives a "sure and steadfast" hope, a hope true as the eternal truth of God, and more precious than our present mortal life.

The Gnostic heresy infected the church at Corinth; and the existence of that heresy was the reason why Paul wrote the fine argument, on the resurrection, which is recited at every Christian burial. Mistaken Corinthians supposed that they might renounce this Christian doctrine without imperilling any other; but the apostle affirms that the doctrine of the resurrection is so vital an element in Christianity that the greatest fact in Christianity

must have been falsely affirmed, if that doctrine be not true; or, in other words, that so inseparable is that doctrine from the resurrection of Christ (the fact that guarantees ours), that to deny our resurrection must be equivalent to a denial of His. Our redemption by Him was so complete as to comprehend our whole nature, body and soul, and if our body will not be raised, neither could Christ have risen. He rose representatively, a public pledge, example, and first-fruit of them that sleep in death; and He is their resurrection and their life. But if our resurrection be impossible, His resurrection was impossible; and, consequently, to disbelieve the prophecy relating to us, is logically to disbelieve the history relating to Him. "If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain." Had Christ not risen, His religion must have perished with Him. His resurrection, ascension, and enthronement in heaven, were demonstrations of the truth of His teaching, that the dead shall rise again. If He did not rise, what must be said of the apostles who alleged that He did rise, and that they saw Him? In that case, they were not honest men, they were deceivers. Paul does not mince the matter. He says plainly, that in that case "we are found false witnesses of God;" not erring witnesses, but lying witnesses, knowing that we lie; "because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not." Paul himself, that most thoroughly conscientious of men, had seen the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord appear from heaven; and his whole character through life, all his actions, his letters, his long series of terrible sufferings, as a witness for Christ, and his martyrdom—which showed that he would die rather than violate his conscience—all combined to establish the moral certainty that it was not possible for such a man as he to be a false witness. Finally, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is

vain; ye are yet in your sins." But, as matter of fact, you are not in your sins, for you have peace and joy in His love; the power of your sins is broken; a holy bias is given to your will; your passions, and the very thoughts of your heart are purified from sin; you have become holy; the fear of death is conquered; you feel "the powers of the world to come;" and, thus, your own conversion and experience form a moral demonstration, to yourselves, of the truth. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." The highest goodness and the motives to that goodness could not have grown out of belief in a lie.

The natural world does not present a single fact to confirm the doctrine of the resurrection, or even to suggest it. No natural fact is in any way like it. Decay and dissolution, reproduction and succession, constitute the order of nature. The tree, stripped of its foliage, stands in nakedness all through the winter, and then, putting forth umbrageous beauties once more, is again clothed in festive attire; but that is not resurrection, for the tree is not cut down, it does not die and live again. Leaves perish like the dead. Each verdant leaf becomes sombre and aged, its juices are dried up, its texture is changed, its stem becomes brittle, and finally it comes tilting in gentle eddies to the ground, where it is trampled under foot, and perishes. Will that leaf, as such, ever live again? Never. The acorns and seed corn, buried in fruitful soil, and acted upon by the chemical agencies of nature, germinate and grow, until new forms of life appear; but though the outer form of life decomposes and becomes food for the germ, the life in that germ does not die. The seed outwardly dies, but the germ lives. In germination there is not resurrection. The transition of an insect, from the chrysalis of the caterpillar, a hard and apparently lifeless crust, into a winged and beautiful butterfly, is truly wonderful; but not in this case either

is there death. Were the chrysalis to be crushed to dust there could not be any new form of life. Nothing has or can have natural life, but what has received that life, through a succession of living forms like itself, from the first of its kind; which was the creation of Him who only "hath life in Himself." Life never, in any instance, proceeded from anything that was dead. Only the living can propagate life. Resurrections are absolutely unknown to nature. Even resemblances to resurrection are unknown. Notwithstanding all this, it may be asked, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" He affirms, by revelation, that He will; why then should not that revelation be believed? His power to create is a demonstration of His power to restore.

Some of the most common phenomena of nature are so wonderful that, were they not known to us, as matters of fact, they would be as incredible as the resurrection. The half civilised natives of tropical Africa, having heard of the inexplicable splendours of the aurora borealis of northern latitudes, of snow falling like showers of downy feathers and covering the earth, and of water being congealed until it bears on its surface very heavy weights, and imprisons ships at sea, have disbelieved the allegations, as impossible. Were there men ignorant of electric storms, they would deem it incredible that fire should fall from clouds, amidst the heaviest showers, and that it should be so brilliant as to dazzle and almost to blind the eye, so inconceivably hot as instantaneously to fuse iron, and so powerful as to demolish great buildings and destroy life. Thunder could not be believed or imagined by any that never heard it; and, to former generations, prophecies of the wonders of modern machinery, of steam, of photography, and of electric telegraphs, would, had they been uttered, have seemed

altogether fabulous, and would have been disbelieved and derided by an incredulous world.

The question—Where are the perished dead, and whence shall they come? suggests a second question, which is not less difficult, *viz.*, where are posterity? and a third, where were we ourselves when William vanquished Harold, when Christ abode with men, when Abraham entertained angels unawares, and when Adam sinned? Indeed, could any one have been a preadamite, and could prophecy have unfolded to him the history of human generations and empires, he also might have asked, if not in incredulity, yet in wonder, where are those generations and empires now, and whence shall they come? Future generations are as unseen as the past; yet they will come and go, as the past came and went. A similar and an equally unanswerable query may be proposed in reference to the vegetable produce of future years. New successions of leaves will appear, of which not the minutest particle can now be recognised. Flowers will come forth, pencilled in tints of exquisite beauty, by the celestial artist, light, and exhaling not less exquisite perfume. Fruits, full of luscious juices, will hang in clusters on trees which, a few months before, were in skeleton nakedness. And fields, over which ploughs and harrows pass, leaving the surface bare, will shortly afterwards be covered, first with the green blade, and then with precious corn. Where now are all those leaves, flowers, and fruits? and where is all the corn of even next year's harvest? The question does not relate to their growth, but to their substance. They will not be new creations. Their constituent elements are all in existence now, and have been from the time of the world's creation. But no man can discern and distinguish them. They are hidden in solids, liquids, vapours, and gases; and yet, by the wonderful processes, which He has ordained, God will bring them forth; and forms of life and beauty

will appear where now they are not. Creation, and reproduction, and resurrection, are equally the ordinations of God. The living verdure of one year is constructed, by absorption and assimilation, from the decomposed bodies of previous years; but the vital forces, which thus annually cover the land with beauty and abundance, owe their existence and their continuous action to Him. Difficulties are known to our ignorance and incapacity; but no difficulties are known to the Infinite One. He who created all things out of nothing, and who, from inert and inanimate elements, made all things that have life, from the least organism up to the human brain, the organ of intelligence and thought, knows where to find the elements of the resurrection bodies, and knows how to raise them. His power is unquestionable; and equally unquestionable are the declarations of His will. "Why," then, "should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" He affirms that it shall be done, and to us, who live not "without God and without hope in the world," His word is the greatest of all certainties. What He has said He will do, is absolutely certain to be done.

The substance of our cherished bodies will hereafter be what it formerly was. As entities we had no existence then, but we now exist, with all our marvellous organs and senses, the creations of the power of God; and after we have returned to the condition from which we came, we shall, at the word of God, come forth once more, as palpable and living forms; not by generation and growth, but instantly and perfectly, not by the power of nature, but by "the power of God," in fulness of stature and strength. In relation to this hope, all nature is silent, but her Creator has spoken; not once only, but repeatedly; not vaguely or in metaphor, but most distinctly, in language most clear, most explicit, and which cannot be misunderstood. Our incredulous heart, faint and trembling,

among the dying and the wrecks of the dead, and in prospect of our own dissolution, is staggered with wonder at so stupendous a miracle; and, with craving eyes, impelled by earthly instincts, we search for aids to our weak perceptions, and for corroborations of our faith. Nature is full of inscrutable mysteries, which teach lessons of modesty and humility to the pedant in human science; yet nonnatural mystery is comparable with that of the resurrection. No true analogies can exist between the natural and the supernatural. Creation offers innumerable testimonies to the character of her Creator, but, with the exception of her origin—which yields the grandest of all testimonies to His supernatural power—she bears no witness to any power superior to that of natural law; yet when God deigned to make revelations to men, as moral beings, endorsements of their genuineness were exacted from the material world. In obedience to His supreme behests, unconscious nature owns implicit and uniform subjection to the laws He ordained; but whenever miraculous attestations of His revealed truth were invoked, her elements and organisations, for the time, disowned allegiance to her ordinary laws, in acts of supernatural obedience to His supreme will. Thus the supernatural bore witness to the spiritual; divine words were confirmed by divine works; and the certainty of that greatest of all miracles, the general resurrection of the dead at the last day, was guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, and by that of the saints that rose immediately after Him. With what avidity, trust, and joy, do successive generations of believers, as they bury their dead, as they advance towards their graves, and as they succumb to all-conquering disease, and die, listen to the words of eternal life which are in Christ! Unbelievers “do err, not knowing the Scriptures;” but His warranty is our hope. Should all men be liars, God is true.

The dissolution of the human body in death is so complete that its resurrection could not be credible on any authority other than that of God. Only He who is able to raise the dead could remove all doubt, and satisfy us that the dead shall rise. The havoc of death is appalling. We shudder at the sight. All men have wept at the grave. Even the Divine Man wept there. No triumph could be more signal, more complete, or apparently more lasting than that of death; so that our senses would judge it to be eternal. But the more complete and durable the power of death may appear, the more magnificent will be the reign of Him who shall overturn it, and bring forth, to a new and more glorious life, all that have died in the Lord. He "hath abolished death."—2 Tim. i., 10. By His covenant that abolition is guaranteed to be as certain, though future, as though it were an existing fact. The apostles preached the whole gospel in two distinctive words, viz., "Jesus and the resurrection."—Acts xvii., 18. Men doubt the prophecy of the resurrection because they are baffled in the attempt to understand how it can be brought to pass; as though the human understanding were a competent judge of objects of faith. Take a handful of mould from some old place of burial, in which the remains of perished generations exist, and the incredulous and sickened heart asks, Can forms of exquisite beauty, life, and tenderness, can living hearts, and skilful hands, and gifted tongues, and eyes brilliant with light, intelligence, and feeling, and can brain come forth from such elements as these? Into what but such elements have human bodies been resolved? and of what do the loveliest human forms now consist, but of such elements as these? The most luscious fruits, and the flowers which seem beautiful enough even for heaven, which might delight the eyes of angels, and which are fit for angels' hands to gather, could not grow independently of elements that

are objects of disgust. We, indeed, can no more comprehend this great work of God than we can comprehend God Himself; yet, on His authority, we believe, though we wonder; nor can any man believe in Jesus who cannot say, in the confidence of faith, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

He that said, "I am Jehovah, thy God," said of the dead, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death;" and He apostrophised death and the grave, saying, "O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will by thy destruction."—Hos. xiii., 4, 14. Accordingly, Isaiah said, "He will swallow up death in victory."—Is. xxv., 8. "Dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust. The earth shall cast out the dead."—Is. xxvi., 19. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."—Dan. xii., 2.

The declarations of our Lord were more explicit, if that be possible, even than those of the ancient prophets. He said, of every true believer in Him, "I will raise him up at the last day."—John vi., 39, 40, 44, 54. From any other man such words would have been evidence of the very insanity of arrogance; but, speaking as the Son of God, He spake as never man spake. Men saw in Him a man in lowly life; and yet His humble form, as the temple of God, was more marvellous than that of the august angel at whose presence Daniel fainted; or than the forms of the cherubic sentinels at the gate of Eden; or than the seraphim, whom Isaiah saw worshipping in the temple. He raised the dead, unlike prophets and apostles, not by invoking the power of God, but by His own power, and by His own word. All that are in the graves, upon hearing His voice, shall come forth, at His word.—John

v., 28-9. He raised the dead, in each instance, at a word. "Lazarus, come forth." "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." "Maid, arise." He thus spake to dead bodies, and they that could not have heard ten thousand thunders, heard His word, and instantly obeyed; and thus He gave public and repeated demonstrations of His power to raise the dead. The dead, as such, can do nothing; but Christ, when dead, raised Himself, uncalled, unheard, and unseen, in the dark solitude of His sepulchre; and to us He has said, "Because I live ye shall live also."—John xiv., 19. Even winds and water, as though they had the organ of hearing, and were endowed with intelligence and will, obeyed His voice. All power in heaven and on earth belongs to Him.—Matt. xxviii., 18. Indeed, "by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."—Col. i., 16, 17.

The certainty of the resurrection is so fully established by Christ, that to reject it is to reject Him, and to doubt it is to doubt Him. All demonstrations of the truth of Christianity are demonstrations of the certainty of the resurrection. Resurrection is the synonyme of adoption and of redemption, for it is "the redemption of our body." Rom. viii., 23. The rewards of fidelity and charity, though not bestowed in this life, shall be at the resurrection of the just.—Luke xiv., 14. The hope of the resurrection sustained believers in their martyrdom, for they did not accept deliverance, "that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. xi., 35. Even God is described as "God who quickeneth the dead" (Rom. iv., 17), "who hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us, by His own power."—1 Cor. vi., 14. So complete is the identity between the work of Christ and the resurrection, that He declared Himself to be "the resurrection and the life."

He that believes in Him, though he may die, shall live; and he that shall be alive at the coming of the Lord, and shall believe in Him, shall never die.—John xi, 26. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.”—Col. iii, 4. How instructive and how comforting are the words of “the very chiefest of the apostles!” “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not go before them which are asleep; for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up, together with them, in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”—1 Thess. iv, 13-17.

CHAP. XV.

THE BODY THAT SHALL BE.

THE resurrection of the dead being certain, the question arises, "With what body do they come?" The glorified body must be, in some sense, identical with the mortal body, or resurrection would be impossible; but in another sense the second body cannot be identical with the first, seeing that it will be "changed." When the Lord said "I will raise him up at the last day," the "him" was the identical one that died, not another; and when Paul said that the body that is sown, in the grave, in one condition, shall be raised in another and superior condition (1 Cor. xv., 42-44), he referred to one and the same body. Thus the identity of the glorified body with the body that is buried is explicitly taught by the highest of all authorities. And yet, with equal explicitness, Paul said of the burial and of the resurrection "Thou sowest not that body that shall be."—1 Cor. xv., 37. The two statements of the apostle, written at the same time, were intended to be taken together; and, so taken, they are not contradictory, but are a complete statement of two aspects of an inexplicable fact.

The grain in the ear of corn and the grain which was at the root are distinct, yet there is a certain degree of identity between them; the substance of one being derived from that of the other. There may not be a particle of the body of the infant in that of the old man, yet, notwithstanding the constant process of change, elements of identity exist between the body of childhood and that of age. Where and what the particles may be of which my body consisted ten years ago, I do not know; nor can I

know where, or which, or in what conditions, are the substances that will constitute my body ten years hence; yet, notwithstanding that my whole substance is always changing, I have such an unchanging identity, that men that knew me formerly know me still; and, after long intervals of absence hereafter, would instantly recognise me. Identity may be undefinable, yet we know that it exists; but if, to understand it, we look beyond phenomena, we look only into deep darkness. Pure carbon may, by chemical agencies, pass through a succession of changes, and continue to retain an identity of substance; for in all the changes there will be an element of permanence. Identity, without change, in an organised living body, cannot exist for two successive moments, seeing that the whole substance of that body is always being wasted and always being renewed. The old particles escape and are replaced by the new. As in a river, succession is in the element and identity is in the stream, so a mysterious and undefinable identity is at all times co-existent, in the body, with waste and renewal. The new elements, in taking the places of the old, take their identical conformation, complexion, functions, and chemical properties; they are subject to identical conditions of health or of disease; and they inherit, not only all the penalties of the transgressions of natural law, by the old, but even hereditary taints, from pre-existing bodies, are inherited. The new particles and the old are so identical as to be undistinguishable. Silently, slowly, constantly, and insensibly does every part of the body change, yet every man finds an identity in his own body, and in that of every other man. So perfect is the identity of any human body that, after a long interval, during which its whole substance may have been several times renewed, nature punishes it for vice, and society for crime. But were materialism true, the retributions of justice would

be unjust; and, in punishing the body of a man's old age, for the vices practised by the body of his youth, there would be injustice, even in that apotheosis of materialism, natural law. As the component particles of the body of the infant are not in the body of the adult, a man could not be himself at two distant periods of his life; and, to be logically consistent, materialism should enfeeble if not extinguish all domestic affections. But even Materialists, practically abjuring their creed, act from natural instincts and with common sense, in practically recognising, in every way, the identity of the body; all its mutations notwithstanding.

Identity and a great change will co-exist in the body at its resurrection. Each human body now in heaven, being glorified, is changed; yet each is the identical body that was on the earth. A corresponding change will be instantaneously experienced by all the living, that shall be meet for heaven, at the coming of the Lord; and they will be assimilated to the condition of the glorified men that are now in heaven; being no longer subject to the same laws of waste and supply, or to any appetites, instincts, perils, or other incidents of animal life. The Lord Jesus, like His glorified saints, retains His identity in glory; so that, though Saul of Tarsus did not know Him, and said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" He was instantly recognised by John, upon His reappearance; for John had known Him and he distinctly remembered Him. The conditions of life in the glorified are new to humanity, so that their bodies never grow old; but, in form and in organisation, they are and always will be human. When the Lord appears He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."—Phil. iii, 21. Thus, "when He shall appear, we shall be like Him."—1 John iii, 2. ~~In our~~

bodies, as in His, there will be identity, and change, and glory. The words of Christ implied the existence of identity, when He said, that they that are in the graves should hear His voice in the graves, and that from the graves they should come forth. "The graves" comprehend all places and all elements in which, in any condition, the bodies of the dead may be. He spake as though the bodies which shall come forth shall be identical with those that are laid in the graves. In what sense, and to what extent, He meant that they would be identical, is not known, nor can it be until the event shall reveal it; and it becomes us to curb the impatience of curiosity, and to wait, in humble faith in His immutable truth and infinite power. This identity of the resurrection body was affirmed by Job when he said, "In my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another."—Job xix., 26, 27. Thus, notwithstanding that our glorified body will be changed, from the condition of our mortal body, it will, by the power of God, and according to His word, be so far the same body, that the same loving voice will be heard, the same eyes will beam forth with intelligence and love, and the grasp of the same hand will be felt, if not in the same sense, yet in as true a sense as that in which the same things might be said of us at any two distant periods of our present lifetime.

The effects of the great change in the identical body are specified by Paul, not to afford gratification to curiosity, but for the comfort of hope. The body is now corruptible, by disease and decay. The very heat that is necessary to life arises from the process of dissolution; being caused by that chemical action of oxygen on the carbon of the body, which burns away its substance with every breath, so that mortality is the law of our nature. Decomposition *is* every moment in conflict with the vital forces by which

the body is renewed as it dissolves; and, when vitality is extinct, decomposition becomes complete. But, in the resurrection body, the laws of life will be so completely altered that we shall be as deathless as angels; so that Revelation, which speaks of fading leaves as emblems of the frailty of the mortal body, finds emblems of the resurrection body in the unfading stars of heaven.—Dan. xii., 3.

Death does deep dishonour to the body. Wealth may give pomp and pageantry to the funeral, but the corpse is kept out of sight; and it may surround the dead with magnificent architecture and statuary, but within the marble sarcophagus and the gorgeous mausoleum the remains of frail humanity are so deeply dishonoured that no eye would see them. Paul designated the corpse a "vile body." In nature nothing is so vile as death. But in declaring the dead body to be a vile body, the apostle, at the same time, affirmed that it should be "fashioned like unto His glorious body," by Him who "is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." Thus for dishonour it will have such glory as no earthly object has. Indications of the appearance of that glory were seen in the person of Elijah, when he descended from heaven; and that visible glory showed that there is literal as well as moral truth in the prophecy of Daniel, that "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii., 3); and in that of Christ, that "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father."—Matt. xiii., 43.

The body is now subject to weakness, so that nightly sleep recruits its wasted strength, and daily food replenishes its wasted substance. Manly vigour yields to sickness; vision and hearing fail; the limbs tremble, from nervous debility; the upright form, when burdened with

years, bends towards the earth to which it must return; old age is weak as infancy; and all resistance finally succumbs to the conqueror of all flesh. The body "is sown in weakness, it (the same body) is raised in power;" being raised by the power of God. Its capabilities of action and enjoyment will then be such as would now be supernatural. New powers will be given to all its organs. It will be unassailable by any inimical forces, it will be able to have such visions of God as would now be impossible, and it will live for ever.

Two words, "natural" and "spiritual," represent the difference between what our bodies now are, and what, after the resurrection, they will be. The natural body is an animal body; but what can "a spiritual body" be? It is a body, not a spirit; it is a substance, having form and organs, and limbs and functions; it is free from animal properties, passions, and infirmities; and yet it is so different a substance, from the bodies known to us, as to be called a spiritual body. Being transubstantiated, it is heavenly rather than earthly, and resembles angelic bodies rather than such as are animal. Our present body is adapted to the conditions of our present life; our glorified body will have a nature peculiarly its own, adapted to the conditions of our future life. "Every man in his own order." We can know such a body negatively rather than positively. Disease will not torture it, age will not subject it to decay. It will not be weakened by hunger, or be delirious from thirst, or be wearied by action. No incidents of infirmity will remain, each capacity will be increased, its youth will be immortal, and, being glorified like Christ, it will be a "glorious body."

"There is a spiritual body," the apostle affirms, even as there is a natural body; and that body is related to Christ, as is the natural body to Adam; for Christ, "a quickening spirit," "quickeneth whom He will." The natural

condition is first, the spiritual condition is equally certain to be, hereafter, and will be as perfectly adapted to life on the renovated and glorified earth, our perpetual heaven, as is our animal body to the present constitution of things on the earth. Flesh and blood, unchanged, could not inherit eternal life; but, being changed, the earthy, in becoming heavenly, will also become incorruptible and immortal.

Two great changes now await us; a change from life to death is now impending, and a second change from death to a high and holy and perpetual life, will succeed it. The power of God, as declared by the word of God, will give to us eternal life. The transition, made certain by "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," will be from the most humiliating to the most blessed and glorious of all conditions; in which we shall be like Him whose splendours blinded one apostle and caused another to fall senseless, from fear, at His feet; for we shall bear His image and be partakers of His glory.

In being thus made like Christ, we shall, as He Himself said, be as the angels are, and be equal to the angels.—Matt. xxii., 30; Luke xx., 36. This was revealed by the Lord, to solve an imaginary difficulty of the Materialists of His time, when they inquired, in relation to a woman that had been seven times married, which of the seven husbands she should have at the resurrection. The answer was that in the resurrection there shall not be any husbands or wives; for marriage and sexes will be done away with. All families will then be one. Family affections are indispensable in the present life; for, without them, infancy and age would perish, in helplessness; they are sources of calm and exquisite enjoyment, and they constitute the chief strength of states; but domestic affections will be unnecessary in the heavenly state, and their effect, were they to exist, would be only to narrow our

sympathies. We, indeed, shall not love our kindred less, but we shall love all others more. In being universal, love will not be less fervent towards any. All "the children of the resurrection," as children of God, will equally belong to one another, in belonging equally to Him; and the blessedness of love will be augmented in proportion to the increase in the number of its objects. But we may well suppose that the memories of our earthly relations and of our earthly loves will never cease to be peculiarly precious and endearing.

The blessedness of the departed, though great, is incomplete; the disembodied state being abnormal and unnatural. Distant as the resurrection may appear to be, prophecies speak of the abolition of death to denote its certainty, as though it were even now an accomplished fact. The period of absence from the body is a mere parenthesis in the narrative of our embodied life; and such will be the brevity of that absence, in comparison with the perpetuity of that life, that our death and resurrection are occasionally spoken of, in the Scripture, as though they were in almost immediate succession.

While there is absolute certainty in our hope, there is obscurity also; not the obscurity of darkness, but of a glory too great to be seen. When Christ "shall appear, we shall be like Him;" but we know so little of what He is, that "it doth not yet appear what we shall be."—1 John iii., 2. The revelations we desire might not be proper, and, owing to the incapacity of human language, they would not be possible; but the revelations given suggest how much is untold which it would be impossible to tell. A glory which cannot be revealed must be greater than we can know or imagine; and, thus, no revelation so enhances our conceptions of eternal glory, as that which shows that it cannot be fully revealed. "We walk by faith not by sight."—2 Cor. v., 7.

In the meantime, the graves of the earth are the treasury of heaven. From every place where men have dwelt, and from all parts of the sea, the dead shall come forth alive. This globe, in its daily and annual revolutions, is largely freighted with human remains, in readiness to yield them up at the command of God. No mines are so rich with gold as is the honey-combed earth with the hidden elements from which He will reconstruct the bodies of His children, in power and in glory. The elements of the perished body are imperishable. Though rock should be disintegrated, though oceans should evaporate, and though suns should be extinguished, the glorified bodies of "the children of the resurrection" will survive. "They shall never perish."—John x., 28. When "all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll" (Is. xxxiv., 4), and when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. iii., 10), the rebuilt and revived body, having put on incorruption and immortality, shall live, and shall be young for ever. What unwearied strength will be in its limbs! what brilliancy in its eyes! what health will be depicted on its face! and what powers of song will be in its voice! Such a body will be worthy to be the abiding residence of a holy, intelligent, and immortal spirit.

This "lively hope" may seem to be too good to be true. But have there not been bright scenes in our early life, scenes which now look like golden visions of romance, in which—with others, equally joyous with ourselves, that have vanished away—our spirits basked in the sunshine of joy and love? yet those scenes, though transient, were real. It is no wonder, then, that the magnificent visions which God our Saviour has deigned to give, of resurrection and eternal life, should appear, to our incredulous

imagination, as a grand illusion of hope—sublime and enchanting, indeed, but having no foundation in fact. But if this hope be false, nothing can be true; all the evidence of Christianity must be forgery; all histories must be novels; all the treasures in the archives of nations must be spurious; the Jews, in their involuntary testimony to Him whom they deny, must be false witnesses; the highest moral excellencies and the most benign charities must be rooted in an imposture; and, after creating the world, the Most High must have abandoned it to chance, and permitted mankind to be mocked with a delusion, than which nothing could seem to be truer or more blessed. But, knowing that our “good hope through grace” is founded on the Rock of Ages, we rehearse the peans of our anticipated triumph at every Christian burial, in the hearing of mourners at the hour of their deepest anguish, and even in the very act of surrendering to “the last enemy” all the spoils of his vanquished ones. All sceptical disputations on the resurrection were declared by Paul, who saw the Lord in His glory, who had had an actual insight of heaven, and who had raised the dead, to be nothing better than “profane and vain babblings;” and he added that, “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His.”—2 Tim. ii., 16 and 19.

CHAP. XVI.

THE GLORIFIED EARTH OUR HEAVEN.

WHAT of our endless future! The time will come when "the end of the world" will be an event of the past; when the Lord shall have been "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire;" when "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God" shall have been heard in every place on the earth; when this era of our world and of our race shall belong only to the yesterday of our never ending life; and when "the dead, small and great," shall have stood before God, at the grand assize. When all these things are past, what will follow, and where shall we be? Shall we, like Christ and others, be translated to the heaven of angels and continue there? or will He and His glorified saints return, and, together with ourselves, reinhabit this earth? It is expressly revealed to us that Christ will return to this world, and that "them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him;" but it is not anywhere said that, after returning from heaven to the earth, He or they will go back to heaven.

The earth was always intended to be the habitation of man. Our body is formed of its substance. Its structure, its subterraneous treasures, its fertile soil, and its undulated surface, were, during countless ages, in course of preparation for the use of man. Deeply as this world has been desecrated by the unutterable vileness of men, it has been highly honoured by the visits of holy angels, and by revelations from heaven, by manifestations of the presence of God, by the footprints of His "Beloved Son," by the atonement at Gethsemane and Calvary, and by

the triumphs of gentleness and charity over human passions, and the moral emancipation of empires, in the benignant reign of Christ; and, notwithstanding all its abominations and miseries in the past, it will, by millennial righteousness, become a consecrated world. Will the holiest children of the earth, then, after all this be eternally expatriated from its surface, thus leaving it to be a vast and silent solitude, with no voices but those of the tempest? Will its loveliest retreats and most magnificent scenery be desolate and void? And will this grand old globe—all redeemed men being transported to the world of angels—be no more the theatre of Divine manifestations, or of human phenomena? Such ideas may exist in the popular imagination, but they have no countenance in Revelation; on the contrary, Revelation teaches that there shall be a new earth and new heavens, wherein dwelleth righteousness; and, consequently, wherein the righteous shall dwell.—2 Pet. iii., 13.

Had the prophecy of a new earth and of new heavens, written by Peter, been in the language of poetry or of symbol, it might have indicated the moral renovation of mankind; but it is not in any way associated with metaphor; it is immediately connected with histories and predictions, every one of which is unquestionably to be understood in a strictly literal sense. The scoffers, that denied the coming of the Lord, arguing from the immutability of nature, were not figures of speech, but living men. The Deluge, which the apostle briefly describes, was an actual fact. "The earth, standing out of the water and in the water," was the solid earth; and that same earth is, together with "the heavens" which "were of old," "reserved," by the word of God, "unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." The statement that one day is with the Lord as thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, is

not figure but fact. And it is a fact that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," as unexpected and as unwelcomed, "in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." These are not symbols of things ecclesiastical or political, they are the literal heavens which we see, and the literal earth on which we live. Peter's history and his prophecy are equally literal. Literally, "the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;" and the "new heavens and a new earth" for which he looked, according to the divine promise in Isaiah lxxv., 17, and lxxvi., 22, were equally literal. There is here no jumble of figures and facts. The historical context determines the true sense of the prophetic promise, and makes it plain that, after the visible heavens have passed away with a great noise, and after the earthy elements have been melted with fervent heat, there will be a literal fulfilment of the promises of God by the ancient prophet, which Peter quoted, when he said, that "we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The heavens which are to pass away with a great noise cannot be the starry heavens, still less can they be the third or angel heavens; they are "the firmament of heaven." The word heaven is first used in the Scriptures to denote the firmament. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." He "divided the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament, and God called the firmament heaven." It is still popularly known as heaven. The firmament is the blue atmosphere; so that the atmosphere is "the heaven" of this and of some other places of Scripture. Thus we read of the "dew of heaven," of "the clouds of heaven," and of "the winds of heaven."

The earth and its atmosphere, then, are now kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment; at which time these things shall be dissolved, and the atmospheric heaven shall pass away with a great noise. The dissolution of the atmosphere indicates the separation of its elements, and the great noise indicates a coincident explosion.

The explosive elements were not known to Peter, as they are to us; for he knew nothing of subterranean heat, or of the ocean of fire within the earth; nor did he know anything of the two inflammable gases which, in chemical combination, constitute water; or of oxygen, one of the two elements of air; yet, because all was known to Him who is the source of all inspiration, Peter wrote about the destruction of the world by fire as a man of science might now write on the possibility of such an event. The oxygen, which constitutes a fifth of the atmosphere and, in volume, a third of water, burns in every flame and fire, and in every animal body, it corrodes iron and disintegrates rock. The other element in water, hydrogen, is equally inflammable. From the two, as oxy-hydrogen, in a state of combustion, and, with infusible lime in the flame, the greatest of all known heat and light are evolved; heat by which iridium, platinum, and silica, formerly regarded as infusible, are melted, and light so brilliant that, even in daylight, a jet is visible at the distance of a hundred miles. The instantaneous union of the two separated gases, at a high temperature, causes a loud explosion, so that explosion seems to be indicated in the prophecy that the atmosphere should pass away with a great noise. In comparison with the noise which such an explosion would cause, that of thunder would be as nothing. Enormous elements of combustion are "kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment," which, if the Almighty so willed, would produce such just phenomena as Peter

foretold; and a wonder has been expressed, by writers on natural philosophy, that the elements should not already have melted with fervent heat, and that the heavens should not have passed away with a great noise. On the day of judgment, the blue atmospheric heavens, which we daily see, shall be on fire, and be dissolved, and, by stupendous explosion, shall pass away.

When that great catastrophe shall occur, "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Modern science, of which "the fisherman" knew nothing, shows how possible and how probable is such an event. The earth would appear to have been originally a great ball of fire; and its surface is believed to be, even now, only a comparatively thin crust around the ocean of burning in the centre; so that three hundred volcanoes belch forth red hot elements from within the molten abyss; and earthquakes indicate the presence of enormous forces of imprisoned gas, generated by heat. That heat is believed to be able to melt any rock. Some rocks, indeed, such as granite, have evidently been in a state of fusion. Mountains and valleys owe their existence to the action of subterranean forces. As we descend in deep mining shafts, the heat increases so greatly that, at the same ratio of increase, iron would melt at the depth of sixty miles. Were the fire "kept in store," within the earth, to burst forth through the crust of its surface, to any large extent, the known elements would indeed melt with fervent heat, and the component parts of oceans and of air would be dissolved, as Peter says, by fire, and would pass away with a great noise.

But dissolution is not annihilation. In changing their condition, elements continue to exist. Annihilation is not known in the material world; for nothing short of a miracle could annihilate. A new earth and new heavens

will come forth from the old, and both will be perfectly adapted to the glorified condition of "the children of the resurrection."

Peter did not know or imagine that, as we have reason to believe, there have been six eras, each of long duration, in the natural history of the earth. That history is now read, as from so many leaves of a great book of revelations, in the numerous layers, with their fossil illustrations, which lie beneath the earth's surface. These clearly show that each era was inferior to that which succeeded it, that the lowest forms of animal life were also the first, and that in each era there were creatures of a higher order than those of the era preceding, until we ascend to the era of man. Moses describes the beginning of the human era, and Peter and John prophetically describe its end. Between the last era and the present there was chaos; and, as Peter shows, the action of fire will cause chaos between the present and the next. Thus the series of eras will continue and be concluded by the addition of a seventh; the magnificent and eternal sabbath of our world. During the next transition, as during the last, the earth will be "without form and void." All "the works that are therein shall be burned up," whether they be divine or human. Nothing that intense fire can destroy will remain, nature and art will pass away, and not a relic of aught that was related to the era of sin will survive the fiery process through which all things will pass.

Where then, while this great change is in process, shall we all be? The apostle Paul answers the question, in 1 Thess. iv., 17, by stating that we shall meet the Lord in the air; that is to say, at a distance from the earth. He, and all that accompany Him, "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."—1 Thess. iv., 16. The "shout" is, in Greek, "a signal-shout." That shout will be the signal

of the descent of the stupendous hosts of heaven, as well as of the coming of the Lord, and of the instantaneous resurrection, and of the new, and magnificent, and endless era of life and glory on this world. But neither He nor they will alight on this globe, until all things pertaining to sin and death are burned up, nor until the new earth and new heavens are created and finished; but He will then establish His world-wide and perpetual monarchy on the glorified earth. The interval of destruction and of new creation may be brief; for though natural processes are slow, the supernatural are not necessarily the work of time. In the meantime, the Lord and His innumerable attendants, though descended from heaven, will not descend to the earth. As the family of Lot, escorted by angels, escaped from Sodom, just before its doom, the living and the quickened dead will escape from the earth, before the universal conflagration. This is most distinctly revealed by Paul. "We which are alive and remain, shall be caught up, together with them" that have been raised from the dead. Thus, the glorified will not, after their resurrection, continue on the earth until the Lord shall return to its surface; they will instantly leave it, to meet Him at His coming. The dead will again live, the living will never die (John xii, 26), all will be changed (1 Cor. xv., 51), and all be transported away to meet the Son of God, and His mighty angels and His glorified saints, in the air; that is to say in regions immediately above the earth.

The multitudes that will thus ascend to meet the Lord will be so enormous that they will appear "in clouds;" for clouds must be read, as in Greek, without the definite article, "the." Their enormous number will cause them to appear as clouds, and they will so cover the heavens as to obscure the sun, in one hemisphere, and the stars in the other. Until the departure of the very last, the

process of renovation by destruction will not be begun. "This," said the Lord, "is the Father's will which sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Not one of the least of His "little ones" shall perish. Before any earthly sign of the funeral obsequies of this doomed world shall appear, the Lord and His servants, the holy angels, will gather together all the units of the mighty aggregate of the saved, that not one may be lost.

This removal of the redeemed from the scene of impending and universal ruin, by fire, will, like their resurrection, be effected by the power of God. Their spiritual bodies may not, indeed, be subject to the attraction of gravitation, equally with animal bodies; but, so far from their ascent being their own act, it is expressly affirmed that it will be by extrinsic and supernatural power, for it is said that they "shall be caught up." The word (*arpazo*) rendered "caught up" denotes the use of external force in carrying away an object. The power that first raises the dead, and then changes the living, will afterwards transport us all away from the scene of universal ruin, to the region of all-sheltering love, in the presence of the Lord of life and glory.

An assemblage of inconceivable magnificence will then appear in the heavens, contiguous to the earth. Its magnitude will be inconceivable. Great multitudes are at all times affecting sights. This unique assembly, consisting of the "innumerable company of angels" and of all the saved of all generations of men, will be "as the sand which is by the sea shore." Every angel and every man in that assembly will appear in glory. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."—Matt. xiii, 43. Moses and Elijah appeared in heavenly glory, on the Mount of Transfiguration, but what will be the appearance of thousands of millions

of men in such glory! They will cover the distant skies, as a cloud of splendour. The lost, left behind in helpless and hopeless condemnation, will, while gazing on the unexampled scene, find no escape from destruction. Then will be the "wrath to come." The holy ones of the earth and of heaven will be brought together as they never were before; and though, locally, the earth and heaven are distant, angels and men will be brethren, and the bonds of unity between them will never be dissolved. While every august angel and every glorified man will witness the almost infinite concourse, and while all the redeemed will have great joy in each other's salvation, no one can behold them all with a joy like the joy of Him that loved us and gave Himself for us. Then, in truth, "He shall see His seed," and "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." And, when the earth has been fully renovated and glorified, and has been thus fitted to be the residence of the redeemed of the Lord, He will repeat the welcome and benediction which, even in the time of His self-humiliation, He rehearsed, saying, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world."—Matt. xxv., 34.

Such an event as the conflagration of a world would appear to be not without example in the infinite universe; for, in several instances, even suns, our night-stars, seem to have been burned up, as this world will be. In each instance the light of the star was so brilliant, during several successive months, as to be visible even in the day time; and then it gradually disappeared; so that such stars have been erased from our sky maps. The presumption is, therefore, that in each case a solar world was either burned up, or was subject to some other great change by which its glory was extinguished.

But the earth is not to become an irreparable wreck.

It was not created for any temporary object, or merely to be, as it has been, the theatre of the stormy passions and sanguinary wars of men. While "kept in store, reserved unto fire," it is also, "by the same word," reserved for a grander destiny than it has ever known; for the present era, ending as it began in chaos, will be succeeded by that of the new earth, and of the new heavens.

Peter was not the first to reveal the new heavens and new earth, for he quoted Isaiah; nor was he the last, for the words thus quoted were repeated by John, as the description of an actual vision that he had of our glorified world. God said, by Isaiah, "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind."—Is. lxv., 17. This prophecy, like a few others, may have two correspondences, one as a metaphor of national transformation, and one as a description of a fact, in the renovation of the earth. Peter's endorsement of the prophecy may also contain its true interpretation, showing, whether it had a moral fulfilment or not, that it will be literally fulfilled. The event thus predicted, by Isaiah and by Peter, was actually witnessed by John, in a vision of the distant future, succeeding the vision of the resurrection of the dead.

When, after the new creation, there shall be a new earth, and new heavens around it, what will be the conditions of life on its surface? On this subject every prophet and apostle, except John, is silent. He alone was permitted to see the glories beyond the day of judgment; and he said, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."—Rev. xxi., 1. This was a vision of matters of fact, for it immediately succeeded other visions of matters of fact, *viz.*, the resurrection, the general judgment, and the end of death; and all these prophecies

must be understood in an equally literal sense. Little as we know of the precise conditions of the resurrection body, we know still less of the new earth and new heaven; but, as all creatures live in elements perfectly adapted to their nature, we may judge of the glorified earth from what we do know of glorified men.

The law of mortality is now universal. The very soil consists, to a large extent, of the remains of organisations which once had life; and the atmosphere dissolves living bodies, even in the very process by which it sustains them. But hereafter all things will be new. Life will reign here for ever. The earth, if not a part of heaven, will be a province of heaven, and it will be so far assimilated to heaven that intercourse between the inhabitants of the two worlds will be frequent and intimate. The entire globe will then be "the inheritance of the saints in light." "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." Not until then will the oft-repeated prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," be fully answered; for Christ's kingdom will not be universal until there shall be an end of sin and an end of death. "They which are persecuted for righteousness sake" will not obtain the full measure of their promised reward until then; nor until then will the four and twenty elders return to live and reign on the earth. The Lord from heaven, the second Adam, will, as a man, be the father and head of the new creation, "when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. And

when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also, Himself, be subject to Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."—1 Cor. xv., 24-28. At this His second coming "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i., 10); and all that have suffered with Him shall reign with Him. This glorified earth will then be our "better country, that is a heavenly;" for it will be our earthly heaven. In this highest sense was Abraham, as "the father of all them that believe," "the heir of the world, through the righteousness of faith." "Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed."

Peter looked for the promised new earth and new heavens, as objects of desire; and, indeed, the whole human creation groans and travails with that desire; which will be realised after the redemption of the body. Even now, this is a beautiful world, and to those that are obedient to all natural and moral laws, it is also, on the whole, a happy world. There are severities of climate, indeed, and widely extended deserts, and electric and ocean storms, and the best of men suffer more or less from the bad; but in almost every place there are beautiful scenes and forms of life, and abundant enjoyment is provided for each appetite and instinct of every creature. The human eye is never sated with the charms of landscapes, of constantly changing seasons, of gorgeous clouds, and of the starry heavens. Men of strong minds have frequently gazed with intense emotion on the transcendent beauties and grandeurs of natural scenery. But the Infinite One has not expended upon this world all His skill, or power, or opulence of love. As the chief glories of the earth are derived from the sun, the sun must greatly exceed it in glory; and all suns must be greatly transcended by the angel world. As our resurrection

body will be superior to our "vile body," so also will our earthly habitation, as a suitable habitation, be correspondently superior to what it now is. Every relic of sin and of death will be destroyed. Every sign of the dark and miserable past will be so completely obliterated that "the former things shall not be remembered nor come into mind." Not only will there be no sin, no suffering, no death, but sublime grandeurs will appear in the firmament, and ineffable loveliness on every spot on the earth. In the new earth and its new heavens, there will be world-wide scenes of holy and imperishable blessedness, which we all, in our glorified bodies, shall enjoy; and in those scenes there will be grander revelations of our Heavenly Father's love than any which our disembodied spirits could enjoy in their intermediate heaven.

Redeemed, risen, and glorified humanity will descend from heaven, with the Son of God, to inhabit the new earth; and, in doing so, will be "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." He, "the tabernacle of God," who, in His self-humiliation, described His body as being the temple of God, will be "with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The scene of His suffering will thus become the scene of His glory; and, on the world on which He died, He will live and reign for ever, among His saints.

This has long been a weeping world; for human eyes are fountains of tears. We daily walk among the graves of the dead, and we nightly sleep where men have slept in death. Sorrow makes its home in every house; wails of anguish, from every latitude, reach through all ages, as though they would never cease; and every living creature, however happy, has a heritage of pain. But "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Eternity shall not witness another tear on the earth. "And there

shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."—Rev. xxi, 4. As the Lord Himself said, of the risen ones, "Neither shall they die any more, but shall be as the angels of God in heaven." Age will bring no decay, time no change. Coffins and shrouds, funeral processions and garments of mourning, burial rites and graves, will have passed away for ever.

The actual condition of the glorified earth being as indescribable as that of the glorified body, John could represent it only by conducting us into the region of metaphor. The return of all glorified men, with the Lord Jesus, to the earth, is represented by the emblem of a holy and magnificent city, descending from God out of heaven; and the image is presented in detail.—Rev. xxi. The city is built of living stones. Its area is said to be a hundred and forty-four million furlongs; and perfect symmetry in its grandeur is denoted by the statement that its length, and breadth, and height, are equal. The streets are pure gold, and yet they are transparent as glass. It has twelve foundations, consisting of precious stones. The security of its inhabitants is denoted by a high wall, which is of jasper. It has twelve gates of pearl, gems of beauty; and angels stand as sentinels at each. All places therein are equally holy; for the whole city is one vast temple for worship. A river, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, consists of living water; and on its banks are trees of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and which are always laden with fruit. And it has perpetual summer and perpetual day, under a concave of unceasing glory; for it is lighted with the glory of God.

This emblem of our heaven on earth is of all others the most expressive. Very different from all earthly cities is the holy Jerusalem. It is indeed holy, for every inhabitant is without spot; it is very happy, for "there

shall be no more curse;" it is very greatly honoured, for "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it;" the inhabitants shall be in the presence of God and shall behold His glory, for "they shall see His face;" and they shall be acknowledged and recognised as His, for "His name shall be in their foreheads." What a magnificent dwelling-place, a city built of gold and of gems! what blessed homes are represented by palaces and streets of gold! what bounties and blessings, by trees of life, constantly yielding fruit! what abounding joys, by a river of living water, ever flowing from the eternal throne! what holiness and what worship, by the city being all temple, resounding with the acclaims of praise! and what splendours, by endless day, from the presence of the glory of God!

Some of John's revelations of our earthly heaven admit of a literal interpretation, and do not point to any moral correspondences. One of these is that there shall be no more sea.—Rev. xxi., 1. If there be no more sea, neither will there be rivers or rains to replenish oceans; existing natural lines of geography will be obliterated; and the present constitution and course of nature, in relation to water, will be changed. This seems to agree with Peter's prophecy of the destruction of the world by fire. About one-fourth only of the earth's surface is land. Wide surfaces of water are now necessary to supply the clouds—our great water carriers—with their fertilising treasures; but when all seas shall be resolved into other elements, three-fourths of the earth's surface, now void of human life, will be as habitable as the loveliest plains and valleys now are, and will be scenes of beauty, life, and enjoyment.

There will be no temple in the holy Jerusalem of the new earth. This also may be literally true. The whole earth will be a temple, filled with the glory, and inhabited by the holy worshippers of God. All ground will then

be "holy ground." Eternal life will everywhere be a perpetual and joyous psalm of praise. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it;" so that every one will dwell within the all-embracing and manifested presence; we in Him and He in us.

"There shall be no night there." This is stated in Rev. xxi, 25, and in xxii, 5. If there be no night, neither can there be sunshine, for night, the earth's own shadow, argues the existence of sunshine. Accordingly, it is said that there will be "no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it" (Rev. xxi, 23); and that the inhabitants "need no candle, neither light of the sun."—Rev. xxii, 5. Thus, neither natural nor artificial light will hereafter be, and yet there will everywhere be daylight, without sunshine; the world-wide city "having the glory of God."—Rev. xxi, 11. "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof."—Rev. xxi, 23. "The Lord God giveth them light."—Rev. xxii, 5. No known natural element can be designated by such words as these; for they give promise of a light and of a glory such as do not now exist on the earth. When, in Bible times, "the glory of the Lord" was beheld, it exceeded the splendour of the sun itself, even in the presence of the sun (Acts xxvi, 13); but, whenever it appeared, it was local, and, consequently it was seen by those only that were near. But the glory of God will completely cover the new heaven, and will constitute the visible heaven; and it will completely encompass and universally lighten the new earth; for it will be an all-embracing canopy of splendour. Thus, the abiding symbol of the presence of God will be everywhere visible on the redeemed and glorified earth, and all the inhabitants will constantly behold and rejoice in the omnipresent glory.

The presence of "the glory of the Lord" over every place, constituting universal and perpetual day, and the

exclusion of solar light and heat from the new earth; clearly show that eternal life will be enjoyed amidst conditions altogether unlike those of the present life. The relation of the earth to the great group of solar worlds may be unchanged, and the sun may continue to be surrounded with his ancient splendours, and the moon to reflect sunshine and earthshine from her bald surface of rock; but the whole firmament of heaven will be our sun; for it will be covered with a Divine glory that will be the light of the world. In that all-surrounding and perpetual presence, there will no night on the earth. The sun and moon will then be invisible, as stars now are in the day; so that it is said that, "neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."—Rev. vii, 16.

Very great changes will be consequent upon the absence of solar action. The succession of seasons and the varieties of climate will then cease. The equatorial regions will no longer be oppressively hot, nor will the polar regions be at any time cold. Vast areas of the earth's surface, which are now wastes of hot and arid sand, and others which are uninhabitable from the stern rigours of winter, will be equally "as the garden of the Lord;" for, being equally lightened by "the glory of God," and by that only, the light and temperature will be everywhere equal; so that all parts of the earth will be equally habitable, and fertile, and beautiful. The earth is now a field of labour, it will then be a universal Eden.

When the ocean of darkness, which now covers half the earth's surface, shall cease to journey round it, and the changes of the moon shall be invisible, there will be no natural divisions of time. Days and nights, weeks, months, years, and centuries will have no existence; and, consequently, dates and chronology will be impossible. Literally, "there shall be time no longer;" there not being any divisions, limits, or measurements of time; the undivided,

incalculable, and endless succession of moments will, in fact, not be time but eternity.

When there shall be no night, there will be no sleep, and, consequently, there will not be weariness, to require rest, nor exhaustion, to require recruited strength; for in the future state, as in the present, the conditions of the earth and its glorified inhabitants will be perfectly correspondent. Weariness and sleep are the characteristics of animal weakness; but the glorified and spiritual body will be endowed with power. Its limbs and organs will be as unwearied in action, and its eyes will be as unslumbering as are those of angels; and the absence of periodical intervals of unconsciousness, in sleep, will be a virtual addition to the life that will never end.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more."—Rev. vii., 16. This prophecy does not imply that the glorified shall never eat or drink—for the digestive organs, though changed, may continue to exist—but that they shall never suffer from want. Our Lord, on one occasion, after His resurrection, ate broiled fish and honey-comb (Luke xxiv., 42, 43); and on two other occasions, when He gave bread to His disciples, He, also, probably, partook of the same. Even angels ate and drank, as Abraham's guests (Gen. xviii., 8); and in Ps. lxxviii., 24, 25, we read of "the corn of heaven," and of "angels' food." Eating and drinking, by the risen dead, may possibly be occasional enjoyments, but natural necessities they certainly will not be. Life will not be a toil and a struggle to live, as it now is to many. Glorified man will not till the ground. The renovated earth will be a universal paradise of fruits and flowers; and one of the pleasures of life may be, like that of sinless man in his garden, "to dress it and to keep it." The landscape scenery will surpass, in loveliness and grandeur, any scenes which now captivate all beholders. No rights of property will exist,

the glorified having "all things in common," so that the old distinctions of owners and occupiers of the soil, and of wealth and poverty, will be among "the former things that are passed away.

"And the gates of it—the holy Jerusalem—shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there." Rev. xxi, 25. We are now fast bound to this earth by an irresistible force, "the gates" are closed to shut us in, so that no man can bodily leave this world, unless it be by the power of God. But the gates that are never open to us in this life will never be shut in the life to come. An unceasing freedom from existing natural restraint, in departing from and returning to the earth, appears to be denoted by the gates being not shut at all during the day—a day that will continue for ever. The gates were opened to Enoch, to Elijah, and to the resurrection saints, who, consequently, departed from the earth to heaven, and one of whom returned, and then, a second time, ascended to heaven. And when the gates shall be opened to us also, we, while angels freely visit our world, may with, perhaps, equal freedom visit theirs. Though our glorious earth be our home and our heaven, we may thus hereafter be permitted occasionally to repair to the metropolitan heaven of the infinite monarchy. No communications are now exchanged between this and any distant world; but the prophecy of ceaselessly open gates, gives promise of open intercommunication between us and other races of the intelligent and holy children of God; notwithstanding that we and they inhabit worlds that are far apart. The men now in heaven will accompany the Lord Jesus back to their native earth, and will then rejoin their native race. But the gates through which they then come will be equally open for their occasional return; and, thus, they that were permitted to ascend to the angel world, may be permitted to revisit it; and we,

who shall inherit the power and the glory which they, as redeemed men, already possess, may be equally favoured in having access to heaven.

Our Lord clearly distinguished the intermediate residence of our departed spirits from our perpetual residence, after the judgment; for He said to His disciples, to console them in prospect of His departure, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv., 2); and yet, at another time, He said, that the kingdom that should be inherited by the risen dead was prepared from the foundation of the world.—Matt. xxv., 34. Thus one preparation had to be made, and our Lord would ascend to heaven to make it; but the other preparation had been made long before, even from the first foundation of the earth; and thus He showed that the earth had been already prepared for us, and that heaven should be. He discriminated between the two places, earth and heaven, and between two periods, past and future; the earth having been prepared from its very foundation; while the place in heaven had yet to be prepared. So marked a distinction is made between the kingdom that had been prepared, and the place which Christ went to prepare, that they cannot be the same. The place was that to which the disciples should follow Him, after their departure from the body; and the kingdom was that to which the risen dead should be welcomed.

Our abode in the angel heaven will be temporary, and it will end with the separate existence of our spirits. In returning to the body, we shall return to the earth, where our bodies will be. Our intermediate residence will be with the holy angels, in a place specially prepared for our disembodied spirits. But heaven was first prepared for angels, not for us; and it was adapted to their nature rather than to ours. Until there shall be re-union between the spirit and the body, the prepared place in

heaven is a most congenial and happy home for the spirit. As a place prepared for glorified and blessed spirits, it is exactly correspondent with their abnormal condition of temporary separation from their own bodies. In that paradise, sheltered and happy, we shall be with the Lord, and shall enjoy all that the disembodied can possibly enjoy. But our permanent residence was always intended to be on the earth, and at the creation of its foundation of molten rock, the preparation was begun, so that it might ultimately become the scene of a divine and imperishable kingdom of intelligent and holy beings. But the preparation is not even yet complete; the final process to adapt the earth to our glorified condition will take place at the coming of the Lord.

Six former eras of the earth were so many days of labour and suffering in its history, and each ended in darkness, death, and chaos; but its next and final era will be one of indescribable and eternal grandeur. That era will be the earth's glorious and perpetual sabbath, prefigured by all other sabbaths; the great day of sweet rest, of perfect beauty, of ceaseless, and universal, and holy worship. Then it will be truly said that "Infinite day excludes the night." In that day the sublimest visions of prophecy culminate; and all the dreams of poetry, and all earthly hopes of humanity pale before its splendours.

The earth will then be one of the loveliest and grandest provinces of heaven. Where Christ was the Man of Sorrows, He will reign as King of Glory; and His kingdom will be the inheritance of His saints. Where we began to live, there we shall live for ever; and where we sinned and were redeemed, where we suffered, and died, and were entombed, there shall we be immortal and supremely blessed. Malignant sin now openly defies God, turning earth into hell, and dreadful death destroys all that live;

but where sin and death now abound, grace and glory shall much more abound.

But will there be room for us all on this earth? Undoubtedly there will be room for all the children of God. Unhappily, all men are not His children. Only they that are made meet, shall share "the inheritance of the saints in light." Man will be the only inhabitant of our glorified world; for other earthly creatures will not survive the transition in which all things "shall be burned up;" and the spiritual bodies of the risen dead will "not live by bread alone." The future earth is represented, not by a farm, but by a city and by a paradise. And when there shall be no more sea, and when vast and almost boundless regions of land, now uninhabitable, shall be "as the garden of the Lord," there will be a stupendous increase in the habitable capacities of the earth. All places will, probably, be equally habitable, beautiful, and blessed; and, though all should be populous as a city, it may still be said "and yet there is room."

Whither, then, are we going? Disease or decay will bring us to the grave; and beyond that realm of natural horrors nothing can be seen. But in Bible times angel visitors came forth from *hades*, and communed with men; and even God Himself, though invisible, uttered audible and articulate words in human ears. Heaven then opened its windows and doors to let the glory through, on this world of moral darkness, sin, and death. Though we die, in common with all earthly creatures, we do not perish like them; nor shall we, as some heathens imagine, become homeless and wandering ghosts, seeing that a prepared place in heaven now awaits our arrival. Earthly friends minister to us, to the last moment of our stay in this world; and, at the first moment of our arrival in another, angel friends greet us with welcomes of love. In the presence of those angels, were they now visible, our weak

nerves might fail us; but as, upon their several appearances to trembling mortals, their first words were "Fear not," they will meet us with reassuring and loving sympathy. The intermediate state will be in paradise (Luke xxiii., 43), with Christ, in the highest heaven; but not until the re-union of the spirit and body will the perfect man, redeemed and glorified, be himself again. The spirit will then look once more on the material world through bodily eyes, listen through bodily ears, speak through bodily lips, think through the organ of brain, and feel in nervous filaments. The body that shall be will be the present body, transubstantiated, and not another. Though "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," some things undoubtedly do appear; for the fact that we shall be, does appear; and where we shall be, with whom we shall be, and how blessed and glorious we shall be, also appear. We know, too, that when our glorious Saviour shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He shall be and as He is. But as the child cannot understand the man, so the man of this life is unable to understand the man of the life to come. There are deep mysteries even in revelations; for mystery is inseparable from the brightest revelation. We gaze on the darkness of the unrevealed, but cannot see; we listen, but no voices, except those in the Bible, speak to us from the unseen world; and we knock at the doors of eternity, as though they, while we stand without, might give some glimpses of the glories within, but no responses are evoked by our most importunate call.

This, however, is the conduct, not of that spirit of faith and patience by which we inherit the promises, but of an inquisitive, impatient, and doubting spirit. We have to wait, in childlike faith, for the new heavens and new earth; and in that faith, though our heart and flesh fail, we have the most profound satisfaction. We first follow

our Saviour to heaven; afterwards we shall return with Him to the earth, where, being again incarnate, in our risen body, we shall re-inhabit our native world, which will then be everywhere inconceivably beautiful. Every inhabitant of the new earth—"wherein dwelleth righteousness"—will be holy, and loving, and glorious as an angel. All suffering will be obliterated, in ineffable enjoyment; and the memory of death will come to be almost lost in the distant perspective of eternity. Golden ages, if ages can then be said to be, will pass by in uninterrupted and endless succession; and eternal life, an infinitely precious benefaction, worthy of Infinite Love, will be fraught with all the blessedness that intelligent, redeemed, and immortal creatures can enjoy. Having this good hope through grace, we do not fear to die, for there is no fear in that hope; we willingly exchange this mortal life for life in the realm of angels; and we welcome even the grave itself, in which our outward man perishes, that our inward man may dwell in the presence of God.

The long succession of ever changing scenes in human history, from the creation with which Genesis begins, to the new creation with which the Apocalypse ends, are like those of a gigantic drama, in which the details are infinitely numerous. The era of sin and death cannot go on for ever. The end is as certain as the beginning. After that end, and after a brief reign of chaos, will come the time of when the Lord will say, "Behold I"—the infinite and almighty I—"make all things new" (Rev. xxi., 5); and, having made all things new, He will add, "It is done." The Lord's last words on the cross were synonymous with these; and, thus, the same thing will be repeated; for what He first said, after His work of suffering, He will again say after the work of glorifying. On the first occasion the great atonement was complete; on the second, the whole sublime project of the Infinite One, in

relation to our race, will be fully accomplished, with all its marvellous incidents and results. And the same lips which, when by death He had obtained life for the world, said "It is finished," will proclaim the completion of the work of our redemption, the destruction of the last vestiges of sin and death, and the inauguration of the era of eternal life and glory, by saying, "It is done."

The apostle John was commanded to place all these revelations on permanent record. When the Lord first appeared, in glory, before Him, He said, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;" and when all the revelations of the new earth and new heavens had been made, He again said to him, "Write; for these words are true and faithful."—Rev. i., 19, and xxi., 5. Every man is forbidden, under the heaviest of all penalties, to omit, to alter, or to add to those true and faithful words. So momentous and so precious are those words, that the incredulous heart—as at the resurrection of Christ—believes not, for joy and wonder. The spirit that craves after visible and palpable certainties, almost doubts the "true and faithful" words, from its profound anxiety that they should be true; for even doubt may be the offspring of intense desire. The glories revealed by those words surpass all imagination. John's visions of the new earth were not "in slumberings on the bed." The scenes, though prophetic, were visibly depicted before him; messages, prophecies, and praises were distinctly audible; and the appearance of the Lord was not that of a phantom, but of an actual, and visible, and palpable presence. The revelations "were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." That hope is as absolutely certain as eternal truth can make it. Death is not more certain than is life; nor is the old creation more actually real now than the new creation will be.

CHAP. XVII.

TRUE VIEWS OF DEATH.

THE heathen "having no hope" (Eph. ii, 12) regard death as the greatest and most irreparable of all calamities; they mourn their dead with inconsolable grief; and many of their elegies and epitaphs, in ancient and modern languages, are expressive of the deepest dejection and despair.

As natural beings, we regard death with dread; but as moral beings, and in reference to the life to come, our faith is the sovereign antidote to fear. The fear of death, indeed, is an instinct in every living creature, given for the preservation of its life; so that every creature, in common with ourselves, is in dread of death; but the greatest fear of death arises from the instincts of conscience. The unsaved believer in the truth is apprehensive of eternal ruin; for he fears the judgment of "Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The "heirs of God" have no such dread, for they rejoice in hope; and if, as men, they fear to die, it is only because they love to live; but even the natural fear of death diminishes as the vital forces decay.

Most men, "through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage." In such men the force of faith is overcome by that of natural instinct. We believe in the revelations of eternal life, and in Christ as the sure way to that life, yet our emotions, as those of natural beings, are sometimes inconsistent with our faith. An apprehensive and timid nature regards death as being a valley of deepest darkness; or as a cold and unfathomed gulf, whose billows are overwhelming; or as "the king of

terrors," in whose presence there can be but one feeling—dismay. We are distressed on account of the departed, though they are in blessedness and glory; and we have wept over them, as though they themselves were doomed to weep for ever. Our griefs are natural, yet they relate to the bereavements of a mere ephemeral life; sometimes they arise, partly, from the great loss we ourselves sustain; and they have, in all instances, an undue and too exclusive regard to the condition of the dissolving body. Our cries of distress might be construed into protests of unbelief in the doctrine of eternal life; and our garments of mourning into emblems of that unbelief. With the light of heaven in our eyes, we weep tears that are worthy only of despair. And even pulpits, whence the hope of a glorious immortality is held forth to the world, are inconsistently arrayed in black, for the departure of men to eternal glory; as though we would hang our sombre draperies, the dark symbols of death and the grave, about the very gates of heaven itself.

Our earthly separations do not thus distress us. When our beloved ones go to another hemisphere, we do not feel that they are lost to us, as when they go to another world. Though separated by a great ocean, we do not fret on their account, so long as they are doing well. Now, our friends in heaven, though dead, are alive; and they never did so well in this world as they now do in that. Their life is far higher and happier than is ours. No considerations, relating to themselves, could induce them to desire to return to the condition of mortality. Though we naturally bewail their departure, our most cherished hope is that we may follow them, and that we may share, with them, in all the opulence that Infinite Love can bestow.

When thanks are offered, at each interment, that the departed is delivered out of the miseries of this sinful

world, and is in joy and felicity, our natural anguish causes us to listen to the joyous psalm of praise with unthankfulness and discontent. We may weep over our dead, as Jesus wept, without sin; but, sometimes, the spirit of submission and faith struggles, as if for existence, amidst the wild surges of grief; and, in most cases, our strong domestic affections, so far from concurring in the offering of praise for the release of the dead, would, if possible, have detained them in this sinful world; and we are distressed that they have left it. Thanksgiving for the death of our beloved ones can never proceed from any natural sentiment; it is the spontaneous expression of nothing less than our sublime faith in Christ and in heaven.

Deeply as we love the present life, we would not live always: for we have aspirations which nothing in this world can satisfy; long continued suffering exhausts our strength and our patience; even pleasures bring satiety; and precious life, at its close, becomes a burden, and we willingly lay it down. When wearied of earth, and when sure of heaven, we even desire to die, more than we ever desired to sleep; and, in many instances, our death is a relief to those of our truest friends that most desired that we should live, as well as to ourselves.

Our apprehensions of suffering, in the closing scene, may be the exaggerations of morbid fear. Many dying men have no 'more consciousness of suffering, in their death, than they had at their birth. Convulsions are seldom felt. Even delirium is a veil of fiction drawn over the facts of dissolution. Sensibility to suffering decays with decaying health and with advancing age, until the very capacity to suffer scarcely remains; and, sometimes, death comes to the aged with so little pain as to be almost as calm and easy as sleep. The suffering incident to extreme exhaustion and weakness, in death,

is probably much less than what we occasionally endure from acute disease, even in the prime of life.

How would we die? If we would die painlessly and calmly, of natural decay and not of acute disease, we must—since, in the natural world, there is no forgiveness of sins—habitually live in conformity with natural law. But in any case we all would solace our heart by saying, like Job, “I shall die in my nest,” at my own home, among my own family, in my own bed. My hour being come, and all legal arrangements for surviving relatives being made, I would detach my heart from the earth, for I shall then belong only to heaven. A few more offices of love may be needful, before I depart, and it would be pleasant to receive them from hands that have long been wont to minister to my comfort. Let me hear no more about the business, or the politics, or the controversies, or the news of the world that I leave behind. As men cast off their clothes for nightly sleep so would I cast off all earthly cares; for they are as nothing to me now; and I would now turn to the glories and to the inhabitants of the unseen and upper sanctuary; where are my treasure, my hope, and my heart. Mere ritual, being a vain show, can yield no comfort or hope to a dying man. With drowning sense and a failing heart, all my strength can be only in full and simple faith in Him who is our all-sufficient Saviour. As I die, let all things around me be calm and still; for a dissolving body and a departing spirit should, if possible, be undisturbed by the distress of others. However great their distress may be, it behoves them, for the sake of the dying, at so momentous a crisis, to be armed with all possible calmness and fortitude; and not to agitate, but to soothe and sustain the spirit of the sufferer. Let me not be troubled, in my last hour, with outcries of grief, with hurrying footsteps, or with probing questions—proposed only to

allay the questioner's anxiety. Even voices of prayer should fall gently and softly on dying ears. Let none but holy and loving words, like angels' whispers, be spoken. If the last sounds I hear be in words of comforting love, I may feel their sweetness as I enter heaven itself, and as I receive angels' welcomes, and the welcome of the Lord of angels and men. To my spirit that will be a blessed hour, in which, having seen the last of earth, I see the first of heaven; and in which the farewells of loving ones in the world of death, are succeeded by the not less loving greetings of holier beings in the world of life.

The gospel gives a new character to death; for its sunshine dispels the terrors that disquiet us in darkness and in fog. Those dismal terrors completely vanish in the light of heaven and of the resurrection; and all its victories—being “swallowed up of life”—disappear for ever. Death is temporary destruction to the body; but to the spirit it is translation and glory. As mortal life ends, a higher and happier life begins. So completely is the terrifying power of death overcome by faith, that many believers are happier in dying than they ever were in living; and even they that trembled at the dread spectre, while it was distant, triumphed, and at once welcomed and defied it, as it drew near.

Whatever horrors there may be in the condition of death, they are entirely unknown to the dead; for the dead cannot know the process of decomposition, or their dark and silent grave, or the burial rites, or even their own corpse. Only the living are acquainted with death; and, to their troubled imagination, dying is crossing a border-land of darkness, haunted with unearthly furies; or it is a mortal struggle through irreparable wrecks; or a narrow escape from amidst burning ruins. All these wild horrors are the creations of ignorant and unbelieving

fear. Only life in heaven can be known to us after our departure from the body; and we are even now distinctly assured that there is absolutely nothing to fear, either in or after death, and that our future shall bring only the objects of our highest hope.

So little fear is there in faith, that even martyrs were not afraid. They did not die amidst the endearments of family love. No tender hands ministered to them in their last hour; they heard no loving words from gentle voices; nor did any loving hearts yearn over them as they departed. Some of them were killed, as malefactors, pursuant to formal sentences of judicial courts; and some perished from the fury of violent men; and yet, with sensibilities equal to our own, they boldly and even joyously confronted the most frightful sufferings. Faith does not make men unmanly cowards, even in death; it makes superhuman heroes; and, in life, it clothes us, not with shrouds and winding sheets, but with the garments of praise. Believers, as such, never fear; for life, and heaven, and resurrection, are not objects of dread. "Believing, we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Having full and simple trust, like that of a little child, in our Redeemer, His peace shall keep our heart and mind, unto eternal life; and, when we are absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord.

Christ "hath abolished death" (2 Tim. i., 10), and "Death is swallowed up in victory."—Is. xxv., 8; 1 Cor. xv., 54. The complete end of death, indeed, cannot come to pass until men shall cease to die, and the dead shall be raised. It is, therefore, an event of the distant future; but, though future, and though distant, it is affirmed to be an existing fact; for such is the manner in which inspired prophecy denotes the absolute certainty of events. Even now death is destroyed, in the purpose, and promise, and covenant of God. The abolition decrees

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has come forth, and it is as irrevocable as was the decree of death; the actual fulfilment being only a question of time. In the law of grace, death is now abolished; and its actual abolition could not be more certain, even had it already taken place, and thus become not a predicted but an historical event. Not only will there be no death, after the resurrection, but every effect, and relic, and sign of its former existence will be so completely destroyed that death will be "swallowed up in victory." And then, the hymn of triumph, rehearsed at every burial, shall be sung, by the redeemed of the Lord, in every part of this glorified world, amidst scenes of indescribable beauty and blessedness, and beneath skies covered with the glory of the Lord. Where is thy sting, O death? and where is thy victory, O grave? The only sting of death is sin, for there is no fear or suffering in holiness and love; and the terrifying strength of sin is in the law that condemns it; but thanks be to God who has given us power to overcome the fear of death, by the certainty of life, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and who will call us forth from the realm of death, to die no more.

A great voice from heaven said to the martyrs of Jesus, in the hearing of John, "Come up hither, and they ascended up to heaven."—Rev. xi. 12. That voice still speaks, through a thousand agencies, to the hearts of the living and of the dying. We now, amidst the devious ways of evil, direct our steps towards heaven, hearkening to the voice of the ascended Lord, who invites us to follow Him, saying, to every true disciple, "Come up hither." "Come up hither," is on the lips of angels and of the living spirits of glorified men. Our own departed ones would not desire to return to a world like this, until it shall be renovated; but—being in the full enjoyment of paradise—would have us to follow them; and they say to our kindred spirits, while we are in the body, "Come up hither," that

you may be partakers of our great joy ; for "the bride says come."—Rev. xxii., 17. In carrying us to the presence of Christ, angels' words will be, "Come up hither." Invitations to ascend to the palace of the King of kings are already addressed to us. We are bidden to the banquet of eternal love. The way is upwards ; and, though we are now bound to the earth, by the cords of natural sympathies, yet, when our hour is come, these ties will be relaxed and severed, so as to set us free, and then we shall go up thither.

That hour brings, to every man, the most momentous of all crises and changes. It is a very sad and dark hour to the believer in the creed of despair ; and to him who knows whither, as one dying in sin, he is about to go, it is darker still. To all who receive not the call of the great voice from heaven, "Come up hither," the shadow of death is indescribably black. But, at that hour, the heir of heaven becomes an inhabitant of heaven. While darkness settles on his bodily eyes, his spirit is ushered into splendours altogether different from and superior to those of the sun. The hour of separation from friends below, is the hour of re-union with beloved ones above. He escapes from the realm of conflict, and death ; and, from this outer court of the temple, where are all manner of things, clean and unclean, he passes beyond the veil, into the presence of the glory of God. Death is the beginning of our life, rather than its end ; for our true birth is at the date of our heritage of life eternal. We then realise, in part, that sublime hope which now sustains us amidst the conflicts and under the burdens of our mortal career ; and that hope will be realised in full when our spirit shall be re-united with our risen and glorified body.

When several women sought for the Lord's body, in the sepulchre, the attendant angels said, "He is not here ;"

and the same words may be said, of the glorified spirit, at the grave of every one that has died in the Lord. "In visiting his grave we do not visit him, for he is not here." The organs through which he was wont to hold communication with the outer world are here, but he himself is not. Only his mortal remains are here, buried and out of sight; but his intelligent, sanctified, and loving spirit, his "inward man," is not here, nor ever will be, until the "vile body" shall be made like the glorious body of the Son of God. The angels told the women where Jesus was not; but, though He was only a few paces distant, they did not say where He was. "He is risen," they said; and that was enough. The true Christian is "risen with Christ." While his body is in the most dismal of all places, his spirit is in the most glorious of all; for he is risen to "the high and holy place," and is there with Christ in His glory. This was the purport of the Lord's intercessory prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou has given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me."—John xvii., 24. Every departed disciple is with Him in that glory now; and where they are, we also very shortly shall be. Angels and Heaven, then, are before us; and the vision is truly enchanting. "All things are ready." O angels, O heaven, O Christ, we daily press toward the mark of the prize of our high calling; we lay hold on eternal life. That life is ours, our chartered inheritance, reserved, beyond all vicissitudes, in heaven. Even now we are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We, therefore, when we die, may welcome death and the grave, because Angels and Heaven will welcome us. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus."—Rev. xxii., 20.



